



STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS

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STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS.

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Maxwell, Mrs. Mary Elizabeth
" (Braddon)

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," "AURORA FLOYD"

ETC. ETC. ETC.

"Egypt, thou knewst too well,
My heart was to thy rudder tied by the strings,
And thou shouldst tow me after; o'er my spirit
Thy full supremacy thou knewst; and that
Thy beck might from the bidding of the gods
Command me."

Stereotyped Edition

LONDON
JOHN AND ROBERT MAXWELL
4, SHOE LANE, FLEET STREET

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STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS.

Book the First.

CHAPTER I.

“ Give me a look, give me a face,
That makes simplicity a grace ;
Robes loosely flowing, hair as free :
Such sweet neglect more taketh me
Than all the adulteries of art ;
They strike mine eyes, but not my heart.”

THE scene was an ancient orchard on the slope of a hill, in the far west of England : an orchard bounded on one side by an old-fashioned garden, where roses and carnations were blooming in their summer glory ; and on the other by a ponderous red-brick wall, heavily buttressed, and with a moat at its outer base—a wall that had been built for the protection of a more important habitation than Hawleigh Vicarage. Time was when the green slope where the rugged apple-trees spread their crooked limbs in the sunshine was a prim pleasance, and when the hill was crowned by the grim towers of Hawleigh Castle. But the civil wars made an end of the gothic towers and machicolated galleries that had weathered many a storm, and nothing was now left save a remnant of the old wall, and one solitary tower, to which some archeologically-minded vicar in time past had joined the modest parsonage of Hawleigh parish. This was a low white building, of the farmhouse type, large and roomy, with bow-windows to some of the lower rooms, and diamond-paned casements to others. In this western land of warm rains and flowers the myrtles and roses climbed to the steeply-sloping roof, and every antique casement was set in a frame of foliage and blossom. It was not a mansion which a modern architect would have been

proud to have built, by any means, but a dwelling-place with which a painter or a poet would have fallen madly in love at first sight.

There were pigeons cooing and boop-boop-booping among the moss-grown corbels of the tower; a blackbird in a wicker cage hanging outside one of the narrow windows; a skylark in a little green wooden box decorating another. The garden where the roses and carnations flourished had somewhat of a neglected look, not weedy or forlorn, only a little unkempt and over-luxuriant, like a garden to which the hireling gardener comes once a week, or which is left to the charge of a single outdoor labourer, who has horses and pigs upon his mind, nay perhaps also the daily distraction of indoor duties, in the boot-and-knife-cleaning way.

Perhaps, looking at the subject from a purely poetical point of view, no garden should ever be better kept than that garden at Hawleigh. What ribbon-bordering, or artistically variegated mosaic of lobelia, and petunia, and calceolaria, and verbena, could ever equal the wild beauty of roses that grew at their own sweet will against a background of seringa and arbutus—shrubs that must have been planted by some unknown benefactor in the remote past, for no incumbent of late years had ever been known to plant anything? What prim platter-like circles of well-behaved bedding-out plants, spick and span from the greenhouse, could charm the sense like the various and yet familiar old-world flowers that filled the long wide borders in Parson Luttrell's flower-garden?

Of this small domain about half an acre consisted of meadow-like grass, not often improved by the roller, and sometimes permitted to flourish in rank luxuriance ankle-deep. The girls—that is to say, Wilmot Luttrell's four daughters—managed to play croquet upon that greensward nevertheless, being at the croquet-playing stage of existence, when a young woman hard driven would play croquet in an empty coal-cellar. Near the house the grass assumed form and dignity, and was bordered by a rugged sweep of loose-gravel, called the carriage drive; and just opposite the drawing-room windows there stood an ancient stone sun-dial, on which the ladies of Hawleigh Castle had marked the slow passage of the empty hours in centuries gone by. Only a hedge of holly divided the garden from a strip of waste land that bordered the dusty high-road; but a row of fine old elms grew on that intervening strip of grass, and secured the Luttrell damsels from the gaze of the vulgar.

But for seclusion, for the sweet sense of utter solitude and retirement, the orchard was best—that undulating slope of mossy turf, cropped close by occasional sheep, which skirted the flower-garden, and stretched away to the rear of the low white

house. The very wall, crowned with gaudy dragon's-mouth, and creeping yellow stone-crop, was in itself a picture; and in the shelter of this wall, which turned its stalwart old back to the west, was the nicest spot for an afternoon's idleness over a new book, or the worthless scrap of lace or muslin which constituted the last mania in the way of fancy-work. This, at least, was what Elizabeth Luttrell said of the old wall, and as she had been born and reared for the nineteen years of her young life at Hawleigh, she was a tolerable judge of the capabilities of garden and orchard. She sits in the shadow of the wall this June afternoon alone, with an unread book in her lap.

Elizabeth Luttrell is the beauty of a family in which all the daughters are or have been handsome—the peerless flower among four fair sisters, who are renowned through this part of the western world as the pretty Miss Luttrells.

About Gertrude the eldest, or Diana the second, or Blanche the youngest, there might be differences of opinion—a question raised as to the length of Gertrude's nose, a doubt as to the width of Diana's mouth, a schism upon the merits of Blanche's figure; but the third daughter of the house of Luttrell was simply perfect; you could no more dispute her beauty than that of the Florentine Venus.

What a picture she made upon this midsummer afternoon, as she sat in the shade of the ruddy old wall, in a holland dress, and with a blue ribbon twisted in her hair, profile of face and figure in full relief against the warm background, every line the perfection of grace and beauty, every hue and every curve a study for a painter! O, if among all the splendid fashion-plates in the Royal Academy—the duchess in black-velvet train and point-lace flounces and scarlet-silk peticoat and diamonds; the marchioness in blue satin and blonde and pearls: the countess in white silk and azaleas; the viscountess in tulle and rose-buds—if in this feast of millinery Elizabeth Luttrell could but shine forth, sitting by the old orchard wall in her washed-out holland gown, what a revelation that fresh young beauty would seem!

It was not a rustic beauty, however—not a loveliness created to be dressed in white muslin and to adorn a cottage—but splendid rather, and worthy to rule the heart of a great man. Nose, a small acquiline; eyes, that darkly-clear gray which in some lights deepens to violet; complexion, a warm brunette; forehead, low and broad; hair of the darkest brown, with ruddy golden beams lurking in its crisp waves—hair which is in itself almost a sufficient justification for any young woman to set up as a beauty, if her stock-in-trade were no more than those dark-brown tresses, those delicately-arched brows and upward curling lashes. In all the varying charms of expression, as well as in regularity of feature, Nature has gifted Elizabeth Luttrell with

a lavish hand. She is the crystallisation of centuries of dead-and-gone Luttrells, all more or less beautiful; for the race is one that can boast of good looks as a family heritage.

She sits alone by the old wall, the western sunlight shining through the red and yellow flowers of the dragon's-mouth above her head; sits alone, with loosely-linked hands lying idle in her lap, and fixed dreaming eyes. It is nearly an hour since she has turned a leaf of her book, when a ringing soprano voice calling her name, and a shower of rose leaves thrown across her face, scare away her day-dreams.

She looks up impatiently, angrily even, at Blanche, the hoyden of the family, who stands above her on the steep grassy slope, with a basket of dilapidated roses on her arm. The damsel, incorrigibly idle alike by nature and habit, has been seized with an industrious fit, and has been clipping and trimming the roses.

"What a lazy creature you are, Lizzie!" she exclaims. "I thought you were going to put the ribbons on your muslin dress for this evening."

"I wish you'd be good enough to concern yourself about your own clothes, Blanche, and leave mine alone. And please don't come screaming at me when I'm—asleep."

"You weren't asleep; your eyes were ever so wide open. You were thinking—I can guess what about—and smiling at your own thoughts. I wish I had anything as nice to think about. That's the worst of having a handsome sister. How can I suppose that any one will ever take any notice of poor little me?"

"Upon my honour, Blanche, I believe you are the most provoking girl in creation!"

"You can't believe that, for you don't know all the girls in creation."

"One of the most, then; but that comes of sending a girl to school. You have all the schoolgirl vulgarities."

"I'm sure I didn't want to go to Miss Derwent's, Lizzie. It was Gertrude's fault, making such a fuss about me, and setting papa at me. I'd much rather have run wild at home."

"I think you'd run wild anywhere, in a convent, even."

"I daresay I should; but that's not the question. I want to know if you're going to wear your clean white muslin, because my own toilet hinges on your decision. It's a serious matter for girls who are allowed only one clean muslin a week."

"I don't know; perhaps I shall wear my blue," replies Elizabeth, with a careless air, pretending to read.

"You won't do anything of the kind. It's ever so tumbled, and I know you like to look nice when Mr. Forde is here. You're such a mean girl, Elizabeth Luttrell. You pretend not to care

a straw how you dress, and dawdle here making believe to read that stupid old volume of travels to the Victoria Thingembob, which the old fogies of the book-club choose for us, instead of some jolly novel; and when we've put on our veriest rags you'll scamper up the back-stairs just at the last moment, and come down a quarter of an hour after he has come, all over crisp muslin flounces and fresh pink ribbons, just as if you'd a French milliner at your beck and call."

"I really can't help it if I know how to put on my things a little better than you and Diana. I'm sure Gertrude is always nicely dressed."

"Yes, Gertrude has the brand of Cain—Gertrude is a born old maid; one can see it in her neck-ribbons and top-knots. Now, how about the white muslin?"

"I wish you wouldn't worry, Blanche; I shall wear exactly what I please. I will not be pestered by a younger sister. What's the time?"

The fourth Miss Luttrell drags a little Geneva silver watch from her belt by a black ribbon—a silver watch presented to her by her father on her fifteenth birthday—to be exchanged for a gold one at some indefinite period of the Vicar's existence, when a gleam of prosperity shall brighten the dull level of his financial career. He has given similar watches to all his daughters on their fifteenth birthdays; but Lizzie's lies forgotten amongst disabled brooches and odd earrings in a trinket-box on her dressing-table. Elizabeth Luttrell does not care to note the progress of her days on a pale-faced Geneva time-piece, value something under five pounds.

"Half-past five by *me*," says Blanche.

"Are you twenty minutes slow, or twenty minutes fast?"

"Well, I believe I'm five-and-twenty minutes slow."

"Then I shall come to dress in half an hour. I wish you'd just tack those pink bows on my dress, Blanche—you're evidently at a loss for something to do."

"Just tack," repeats the younger sister with a wry face; "you mean sew them on, I suppose. That's like people asking you to 'touch' the bell, when you're comfortably coiled up in an easy-chair at the other end of the room. It sounds less than asking one to ring it; but one has to disturb oneself all the same. I don't see why you shouldn't sew on your own ribbons; and I'm dead tired—I've been standing in the broiling sun for the last hour, trimming the roses, and trying to make the garden look a little decent."

"O, very well; I can get my dress ready myself," says Elizabeth with a grand air, not lifting her eyes from the volume in which she struggles vainly to follow the current of the Victoria Nyanza. Has not Malcolm Forde expressed a respectful

wish that she were a little less vague in her notions of all that vast world which lies beyond the market-town and rustic suburbs of Hawleigh?

"Don't be offended, Lizzie; you know I always do anything you ask me. Where are the ribbons?"

"In the left-hand top drawer. Be sure you don't tumble my frounces."

"I'll take care. I'm so glad you're going to wear your white: for now I can wear mine without Gertrude grumbling about my extravagance in beginning a clean muslin at the end of the week: as if people with any pretence to refinement ever made any difference in their gowns at the end of the week—as if anybody but utter barbarians would go grubby because it was Friday or Saturday! Mind you come up-stairs in time to dress, Lizzie."

"I shall be ready, child. The people are not to be here till seven."

"The people! as if you cared one straw about Jane Harrison or Laura Melvin and that preposterous brother of hers!"

"You manage to flirt with the preposterous brother, at any rate," says Lizzie, still looking down at her book.

"O, one must get one's hand in somehow. And as if there were any choice of a subject in this God-forsaken place!"

"Blanche, how can you use such horrid expressions?"

"But it is God-forsaken. I heard Captain Fielding call it so the other day."

"You are always picking up somebody's phrases. Do go and tack on those ribbons, or I shall have to do it myself."

"And that would be a calamity," cries Blanche, laughing, "when there is anybody else whose services you can utilise!"

It was one of the golden rules of Elizabeth Luttrell's life that she should never do anything for herself which she could get any one else to do for her. What was the good of having three unmarried sisters—all plainer than one's self—unless one made some use of them? She herself had grown up like a flower, as beautiful and as useless; not to toil or spin—only to be admired and cherished as a type of God-given idle loveliness.

That her beauty was to be profitable to herself and to the world by-and-by in some large way, she regarded as an inevitable consequence of her existence. She had troubled herself very little about the future; had scarcely chafed against the narrow bounds of her daily life. That certainty of high fortune awaiting her in the coming years supported and sustained her. In the meanwhile she lived her life—a life not altogether devoid of delight, but into which the element of passion had not yet entered.

Even in so dull a place as Hawleigh there were plenty of admirers for such a girl as Elizabeth Luttrell. She had drunk freely of the nectar of praise; knew the full measure of her

beauty, and felt that she was bound to conquer. All the little victories, the trivial flirtations of the present, were, in her mind, mere child's play; but they served to give some variety to an existence which would have been intolerably monotonous without them.

She went on reading, or trying to read, for half an hour after Blanche had skipped up the green slope where the apple-trees spread a fantastic carpet of light and shade in the afternoon sunshine; she tried her hardest to chain her thoughts to that book of African travel, but the Victoria Nyanza eluded her like a will-o'-the-wisp. Her thoughts went back to a little scene under an avenue of ancient limes in Hawleigh-road—a scene that had been acted only a few hours ago. It was not very much to think of: only an accidental meeting with her father's curate, Malcolm Forde; only a little commonplace talk about the parish and the choir, the early services, and the latest volumes obtainable at the Hawleigh book-club.

Mr. Luttrell had employed four curates since Lizzie's sixteenth birthday; and the first, second, and third of these young Levites had been Lizzie's devoted slaves. It had become an established rule that the curate—Mr. Luttrell could only afford one, though there were two churches in his duty—should fall madly in love with Elizabeth. But the fourth curate was of a different stuff from the material out of which the three simpering young gentlemen fresh from college were created. Malcolm Forde was five-and-thirty years of age; a man who had been a soldier, and who had taken up this new service from conviction; a man who possessed an income amply sufficient for his own simple needs, and in no way looked to the Church as an honourable manner of solving the great enigma of how a gentleman is to maintain himself in this world. He was a Christian in the purest and widest sense of the word; an earnest thinker, an indefatigable worker; an enthusiast upon all subjects relating to his beloved Church.

To such a man as this all small flirtations and girlish follies must needs appear trivial in the extreme; but Mr. Forde was not a prig, nor was he prone to parade his piety before the eyes of the world. So he fell into the ways of Hawleigh with consummate ease: played croquet with the mallet of a master; disliked high-jinks and grandiose entertainments at rich people's houses, but was not above an impromptu picnic with his intimate associates, a gipsy-tea in Everton wood, or a friendly musical evening at the parsonage. He had little time to devote to such relaxations, but did not disdain them on occasion.

At the outset of their acquaintance the four Luttrell girls vowed they should always be afraid of him, that those dreadful cold grey eyes of his made them feel uncomfortable.

"When he looks at me in that grave searching way, I positively feel myself the wickedest creature in the world," cried Diana, who was of a sprightly disposition, and prone to a candid confession of all her weaknesses. "How I should hate to marry such a man! It would be like being perpetually brought face to face with one's conscience."

"I think a woman's husband ought, in a manner, to represent her conscience," said Gertrude, who was nine-and-twenty, and prided herself upon being serious-minded. "At least I should like to see all my faults and follies reflected in my husband's face, and to grow out of them by his influence."

"What a hard time your husband would have of it, Gerty!" exclaimed the flippant Blanche, assisting at the conversation from outside the open window of the breakfast-room or den, in which the four damsels were as untidy as they pleased; Elizabeth's colour-box and drawing-board, Gertrude's work-box, Diana's desk, Blanche's Dorcas bag, all heaped pell-mell upon the battered old sideboard.

"If you spent more time among the poor, Diana," said Gertrude, not deigning to notice this interruption, "you need not be afraid of any man's eyes. When our own hearts are at peace——"

"Don't, please, Gerty; don't give me any warmed-up versions of your tracts. The state of my own heart has nothing to do with the question. If I were the most spotless being in creation, I should feel just the same about Mr. Forde's eyes. As for district-visiting, you know very well that my health was never good enough for that kind of thing; and I'm sure if papa had six daughters instead of four, you do enough in the goody-goody line for the whole batch."

Miss Luttrell gave a gentle sigh, and continued her needlework in silence. She could not help feeling that she was the one bit of leaven that leavened the whole lump; that if a general destruction were threatened the daughters of Hawleigh by reason of their frivolities, her own sterling merits might buy them off—as the ten righteous men who were *not* to be found in Sodom might have ransomed that guilty population.

Elizabeth had been busy painting a little bit of still-life—an over-ripe peach and a handful of pansies and mulberry-leaves lying loosely scattered at the base of Mr. Luttrell's Venetian claret-flask. She had gone steadily on with her work, laying on little dabs of transparent colour with a quick light touch, and not vouchsafing any expression of interest in the discussion of Mr. Forde's peculiarities.

"He's very good-looking," Diana said meditatively. "Don't you think so, Lizzie? You're an authority upon curates."

Elizabeth shrugged her shoulders, and answered in her most indifferent tone:

"Tolerably! He has rather a good forehead."

"Rather good!" exclaimed Gertrude, grinding industriously across an expanse of calico with her cutting-out scissors. "He has the forehead of an apostle."

"How do you know that? You never saw an apostle," cried Blanche from the window, with her favourite line of argument. "And as for the pictures we see of them, that's all humbug! for there were no photographers in Judea."

"Come indoors, Blanche, and write a German exercise," said Gertrude. "It's too bad to stand out there all the morning, killing away your time."

"And spoiling your complexion into the bargain," added Diana. "What a tawny little wretch you are becoming!"

"I don't care two straws about my complexion, and I'm not going to cramp my hand with that horrid German!"

"Think of the privilege of being able to read Schiller in the original!" said Gertrude solemnly.

"I don't think much of it; for I never see you read him, though you do pride yourself on your German," answered the flippant Blanche. And then they went back to Mr. Forde, and discussed his eyes and forehead over again; not arriving at any very definite expression of opinion at the last, and Elizabeth holding her ideas in reserve.

"I don't think this one will be quite like the rest, Liz," said Diana significantly.

"What do you mean by like the rest?"

"Why, he won't make a fool of himself about you, as Mr. Horton did, with his flute-playing and stuff; and he won't go on like Mr. Dysart; and he won't write sentimental poetry, and languish about all the afternoon spooning at croquet, like little Mr. Adderley. You needn't count upon making a conquest of *him*, Lizzie. He has the ideas of a monk."

"Abelard was destined to become a monk," replied Elizabeth calmly, "but that did not prevent his falling in love with Eloïse."

"O, I daresay you think it will end by his being as weak as the rest. But he told me that he does not approve of a priest marrying—rather rude, wasn't it? when you consider that we should not be in existence, if papa had entertained the same opinion."

"I don't suppose we count for much in his grand ideas of religion," answered Elizabeth a little contemptuously. She had held her small flirtations with previous curates as the merest trifling, but the trifling had been pleasant enough in its way. She had liked the incense. And behold, here was a man who withheld all praise; who had made his own scheme of life—a scheme from which she, Elizabeth Luttrell, was excluded. It was a new thing

for her to find that she counted for nothing in the existence of any young man who knew her.

This conversation took place when Mr. Forde had been at Hawleigh about a month. Time slipped past. Malcolm Forde took the parish in hand with a firm grip, Mr. Luttrell being an easy-going gentleman, quite agreeable to let his curate work as hard as he liked. The two sleepy old churches awoke into new life. Where there had been two services on a Sunday there were now four; where there had been one service on a great church festival there were now five. The dim old aisles bloomed with flowers at Easter and Ascension, at Whitsuntide and Harvest-thanksgiving-feast; and the damsels of Hawleigh had new work to do in the decoration of the churches and in the embroidery of chalice-covers and altar-cloths.

But it was not only in extra services and beautification of the temples alone that Mr. Forde brought about a new aspect of affairs in Hawleigh. The poor were cared for as they had never been cared for before. Almost all the time that the soldier-curate could spare from his public duties he devoted to private ministration. And yet when he did permit himself an afternoon's recreation, he came to gipsy tea-drinking or croquet with as fresh an air as if he were a man who lived only for pleasure. Above all, he never preached sermons—out of the pulpit. That was his one merit, Lizzie Luttrell said, in a somewhat disparaging tone.

“His one fault is, to be so unlike the other curates, Liz, and able to resist your blandishments,” said Diana sharply.

Mr. Forde had made himself a favourite with all that household except Elizabeth. The three other girls worshipped him. She rarely mentioned him without a sneer. And yet she was thinking of him this midsummer afternoon, as she sat by the orchard wall, trying to read the volume he had recommended; she was thinking of a few grave words in which he had confessed his interest in her; thinking of the dark searching eyes which had looked for one brief moment into her own.

“I really thought I counted for nothing,” she said to herself. “he has such off-hand ways, and sets himself so much above other people. I don't think he quite means to be grand; it seems natural to him. He ought to have been a general at least in India, instead of a twopenny-halfpenny captain!”

The half-hour was soon gone. It was very pleasant to her, that idling in the shadow of the old wall; for the thoughts of her morning's walk were strangely sweet—sweeter than any flatteries that had ever been whispered in her ear. And yet Mr. Forde had not praised her; had indeed seemed utterly unconscious of her superiority to other women. His words had been frank, and grave, and kindly: a little too much like a lecture

perhaps, and yet sweet; for they were the first words in which Malcolm Forde had betrayed the faintest interest in her welfare. And it is a hard thing for a young woman, who has been a goddess and an angel in the sight of three consecutive curates, to find the fourth as indifferent to her merits as if he were a man of stone.

Yes, he had decidedly lectured her. That is to say, he had spoken a little regretfully of her trivial wasted life—her neglected opportunities.

“I don’t know what you mean by opportunities,” she had answered, with a little contemptuous curl of the rosy upper lip. “I can’t burst out all at once into a female bishop. As for district-visiting, I have really no genius for that kind of thing, and feel myself a useless bore in poor people’s houses. I know I have been rather idle about the church embroidery, too,” she added with a deprecating air, feeling that here he had cause for complaint.

“I am very anxious that our churches should be made beautiful,” he answered gravely; “and I should think it only natural for you to take a delight in that kind of labour. But I do not consider ecclesiastical embroidery the beginning and end of life. I should like to see you more interested in the poor and in the schools, more interested in your fellow-creatures altogether, in short. I fancy the life you lead at Hawleigh Vicarage among your roses and apple-trees is just a little the life of the lotus-eater.

‘All its allotted length of days
The flower ripens in its place,
Ripens and fades and falls, and hath no toil,
Fast rooted in the fruitful soil.’

It doesn’t do for a responsible being to live that kind of life, you know, leaving no better memory behind than the record of its beauty. I should hardly venture to say so much as this Miss Luttrell, if I were not warmly interested in you.”

The clear pale face, looking downward with rather a moody air, like the face of a wayward child that can hardly suffer a rebuke, flushed sudden crimson at his last words. To Mr. Forde’s surprise; for the interest he had confessed was of a purely priestly kind. But young women are so sensitive, and he was not unused to see his female parishioners blush and tremble a little under the magnetism of his earnest gaze and low grave voice.

Conscious of that foolish blush, Elizabeth tried to carry off her confusion by a rather flippant laugh.

“You read your Tennyson, you see,” she said, “though you

lecture me for my idleness. Isn't poetry a kind of loto-eating?"

"Hardly, I think. I don't consider my duty stern enough to cut me off from all the flowers of life. I should be sorry to moon about with a duodecimo Tennyson in my pocket when I ought to be at work; but when I have a stray half-hour, I can give myself a little indulgence of that kind. Besides, Tennyson is something more than a poet. He is a teacher."

"You will come to play croquet for an hour this evening, won't you? Gertrude wrote to you yesterday, I think."

"Yes, I must apologise for not answering her note. I shall be most happy to come, if possible. But I have two or three sick people to visit this afternoon, and I am not quite sure of my time. The poor souls cling to one so at last. They want a friendly hand to grasp on the threshold of the dark valley, and they have some dim notion that we hold the keys of the other world, and can open a door for them and let them through to a better place than they could win for themselves."

"It must be dreadful to see so much of death," said Elizabeth, with a faint shudder.

"Hardly so dreadful as you may suppose. A deathbed develops some of the noblest qualities of a man's nature. I have seen so much unselfish thoughtfulness for others, so much tenderness and love in the dying. And then for these poor people life has been for the most part so barren, so troubled, it is like passing away from a perpetual struggle to a land that is to be all brightness and rest. If you would only spend more time among your father's parishioners, Miss Luttrell, you would learn much that is worth learning of life and death."

"I couldn't endure it," she answered, shrugging her shoulders impatiently; "I ought never to have been born a parson's daughter. I should do no good, but harm more likely. The people would see how miserable I thought them, and be all the more discontented with their wretched lots after my visits. I can't act goody-goody as Gertrude does, and make those poor wretches believe that I think it the nicest thing in the world to live in one room, and have hardly bread to eat, and only one blanket among six. It's too dreadful. Six weeks of it would kill me."

Mr. Forde sighed ever so faintly, but said no more. What a poor, selfish, narrow soul this lovely girl's must be! Nature does sometimes enshrine her commonest spirits in these splendid temples. He felt a little disappointed by the girl's selfishness and coldness; for he had imagined that she needed only to be awakened from the happy idleness of a young joy-loving spirit. He said no more, though they walked side by side as far as

St. Mary's, the red square-towered church at the beginning of the town, and parted with perfect friendliness. Yet the thought of that interview vexed Malcolm Forde all day long.

"I had hoped better things of her," he said to himself. "But of course I shan't give up. She is so young, and seems to have a pliant disposition. What a pity that Luttrell has let his daughters grow up just as they please, like the foxgloves in his hedges!"

In Mr. Forde's opinion, those four young women ought to have been trained into a little band of sisters of mercy—a pious sisterhood carrying life and light into the dark alleys of Hawleigh. It was not a large place, that western market-town, numbering eleven thousand souls in all; yet there were alleys enough, and moral darkness and poverty and sickness and sorrow enough, to make work for a nunnery of ministering women. Mr. Forde had plenty of district-visitors ready to labour for him; but they were for the most part ill-advised and frivolous ministrants, and absorbed more of his time by their need of counsel and supervision than he cared to give them. They were of the weakest order of womanhood, craving perpetual support and assistance, wanting all of them to play the ivy to Mr. Forde's oak; and no oak, however vigorous, could have sustained such a weight of ivy. He had to tell them sometimes, in plainest words, that if they couldn't do their work without continual recourse to him, their work was scarcely worth having. Whereupon the weaker vessels dropped away, admitting in their High-Church slang that they had no "vocation;" that is to say, there was too much bread and too little sack in the business, too much of the poor and not enough of Mr. Forde.

For this reason he liked Gertrude Luttrell, who went about her work in a womanlike way, rarely applied to him for counsel, had her own opinions, and really did achieve some good. It may have been for this reason, and in his desire to oblige Gertrude, that he made a little effort, and contrived to play croquet in the Vicarage garden on this midsummer evening.

CHAPTER II.

"Best leave or take the perfect creature,
Take all she is or leave complete;
Transmute you will not form or feature,
Change feet for wings or wings for feet."

It was halcyon weather for croquet; not a cloud in the warm summer sky, and promise of a glorious sunset, red and glowing,

for "the shepherd's delight." The grass had been snorn that morning, and was soft and thick, and sweet with a thymy perfume: a little uneven here and there, but affording so much the more opportunity for the players to prove themselves superior to small difficulties. The roses and seringa were in their midsummer glory, and from the white walls of the Vicarage came the sweet odours of jasmine and honeysuckle, clematis and myrtle. All sweet-scented flowers seemed to grow here with a wider luxuriance than Malcolm Forde had ever seen anywhere else. His own small patrimony was on a northern soil, and all his youthful recollections were of a bleaker land than this.

"An enervating climate, I'm afraid," he said to himself; and it seemed to him that the roses and the seringa might be a "snare." There was something stifling in the slumberous summer air, the Arcadian luxury of syllabubs and cream, the verdure and blossom of this flowery land. He felt as if his soul must needs stagnate, as if life must become too much an affair of the senses, in so sweet and sensuous a clime.

This was but a passing fancy which flashed upon him as he opened the broad white gate and went into the garden, where the four girls in their white gowns and various ribbons were scattered on the grass: Blanche striking the last hoop into its place with her mallet; Diana trying a stroke at loose croquet; Gertrude busy at a tea-table placed in the shade of a splendid Spanish chestnut, which spread its branches low and wide, making a tent of greenery beneath which a dozen people could dine in comfort. Elizabeth, apart from all the rest, standing by the sun-dial, tall, and straight as a dart, looking like a Greek princess in the days when the gods fell in love with the daughters of earthly kings.

Mr. Forde was not a Greek god, but a faint thrill stirred his senses at the sight of that gracious figure by the sun-dial, nevertheless; only an artist's delight in perfect beauty. The life which he had planned for himself was in most things the life of a monk; but he could not help feeling that Elizabeth Luttrell was perfectly beautiful, and that for a man of a weaker stamp there might be danger in this friendly association, which brought them together somehow two or three times in every week.

"I have known her a year, and she has never touched my heart in the faintest degree," he told himself, with some sense of triumph in the knowledge that he was impervious to such fascinations. "If we were immortal, and could go on knowing each other for thirty years—she for ever beautiful and young, I forever in the prime of manhood—I do not think she would be any nearer to me than she is now."

Mr. Forde was the first of the guests. The three girls ran forward to receive him, greeting him with a kind of rapture. It was so good of him to come, they gushed out simultaneously. They felt as if a saint had come to take the first red ball and mallet. Gertrude always gave Mr. Forde the red-ringed balls; she said they reminded her of the rubric.

Elizabeth stirred not at all. She stood by the sun-dial, her face to the west, contemplative, or simply indifferent, Mr. Forde could not tell which. Did she see him, he wondered, and deliberately refrain from greeting him? Or was she so lost in thought as to be unconscious of his presence? Or did she resent his little lecture of that morning? She could hardly do that, he considered, when they had parted in perfect friendship.

"It is so good of you to be punctual," said Gertrude, making a pleasant little jingling with the china teacups; the best china, all blue-and-gold, hoarded away in the topmost of cupboards, wrapped in much silver paper, and only taken down for festive tea-drinkings like this.

It was not a kettledrum tea, but a rustic feast rather; or a "tea-shuffle," as young Mr. Melvin the lawyer, called it. There was a round table, covered with a snowy table-cloth, and laden with home produce: a pound-cake of golden hue; preserved fruits of warm red and amber tint in sparkling cut-glass jars; that standing-dish on west-country tables, a junket; home-made bread, with the brown kissing-crust that never comes from the hireling baker's oven; teacakes of feathery lightness; rich yellow butter, which to the epicure might have been worth a journey from London to Devonshire; and for the crowning glory of the banquet, a capacious basket of strawberries and a bowl of clotted cream.

"The Melvins are always late," said Diana; "but we are not going to let you wait for your tea, Mr. Forde—are we, Gertrude? Here comes Ann with the kettle."

This silver tea kettle was the pride of the Luttrell household. It had been presented to Mr. Luttrell at the close of his ministrations in a former parish, and was engraved with the Luttrell coat of arms in all the splendour of its numerous quarterings. A spirit-lamp burned beneath this sacred vessel, which Gertrude tended as carefully as if she had been a vestal virgin watching the immortal flame.

Mr. Forde insisted that they should wait for the rest of the company. He did not languish for that cup of tea wherewith Miss Luttrell was eager to refresh his tired frame. Perhaps in such a moment his thoughts may have glanced back to the half-forgotten mess-table, and its less innocent banquets; the long table, glittering in the low sunshine, with its bright array of *crystal glasses* and costly silver—was not his corps renowned for

its taste in these trifles?—the pleasant familiar faces, the talk and laughter. Time was when he had lived his life, and that altogether another life, differing in every detail from his existence of to-day, holding not one hope, or dream, or project which he cherished now. He could look back at those idle pleasures, those aimless days, without the faintest sigh of regret. Saddened, discouraged, fainthearted, he had often been since this pilgrimage of his was begun; but never for one weak moment had he looked longingly back.

He said a few words to Blanche, who blushed, and sparkled, and answered him in little gasps, with upward worshipping gaze, as if he had been indeed an apostle; talked with Diana for five minutes or so about the choir—she played the harmonium in St. Mary's, the older of the two churches, which did not boast an organ; and then strolled across the grass to the sundial, where Lizzie was still standing in mute contemplation of the western sky.

They shook hands almost silently. He did not intend to apologise for what he had said that morning. If the reproof had stung her, so much the better. He had meant to reprove. And yet it pained him a little to think that he had offended her. How lovely she was as she stood before him, smiling, in the western sunshine! He never remembered having seen anything so beautiful, except a face of Guido's—the face of the Virgin-mother—in a Roman picture-gallery. That smile relieved his mind a little. She could hardly be offended.

“You have had a fatiguing day, I suppose, with your sick people?” she said suddenly, after a few words about the beauty of the evening and the unpunctuality of their friends. “Do you know, I have been thinking of what you said to me this morning, all day long; and I begin to feel that I must do something. It seems almost as if I had had what evangelical people describe as ‘a call.’ I should really like to do something. I don't suppose any good will come of it—I know it is not my line—and I am rather sorry you tried to awaken my lumbering conscience. But you must tell me what I am to do. I am your pupil, you know—your Madame de Chantal, St. Francis!”

She looked up at him with her thrilling smile—the deep violet eyes just lifted for a moment to his own, with a glance which was swift and sudden as the flight of an arrow. Across his mind there flashed the memory of mediæval legends of witchcraft and crime: records of priestly passion—of women whose noxious presence had brought shame upon holy sisterhoods—of infatuation so fatal as to seem the inspiration of Satan—of baneful beauty that had lighted the way to the torture-chamber and the stake. An idle memory in such a mo-

ment! What had he to do with those dark passions—the fungus-growth of an age that was all darkness?

“I think your father is more than competent to advise you,” he answered gravely.

“O, no man is a prophet in his own country,” she said carelessly. “I should never think of talking to papa about spiritual things; we have too many painful interviews upon the subject of pocket-money. If you want to reclaim me, you must help me a little, Mr. Forde. But perhaps I am not worth the trouble?”

“You cannot doubt that I should be glad to be of use to you. But it would be presumption on my part to dictate. Your own good sense will prompt you, and you have an admirable counsellor in your sister Gertrude, my best district-visitor.”

“I should never submit to be drilled by Gertrude. No; if you won’t help me, I must wait for inspiration. As for district-visiting, I can’t tell you how I hate the very notion of it. If there were another Crimean war now, I should like to go out as a nursing-sister, especially if”—she looked at him with another briefly mischievous glance—“if there were nice people to nurse.”

“I’m afraid, young ladies whose inclinations point to a military theatre are hardly in the right road,” he said coldly.

He felt that she was trifling with him, and was inclined to be angry. He walked away from the sun-dial towards the hall-floor, from which Mr. Luttrell was slowly emerging—an elderly gentleman, tall and stout, with a still handsome face framed in silky gray whiskers, and a slightly worn-out air, as of a man who had mistaken his vocation, and never quite recovered his discovery of the mistake.

“Very good of you to come and play croquet with my children, Forde,” he said in his good-natured lazy way—he had called them children when they were all in the nursery, and he called them children still—“especially as I don’t think it’s particularly in your line. O, here come the Melvins and Miss Harrison; so I suppose we are to begin tea, in order that you may have an hour’s daylight for your game?”

Elizabeth had walked away from the sundial in an opposite direction, smiling softly to herself. It was something to have made him angry. She had seen the pale dark face flush hotly for a moment; a sudden fire kindled in the deep grey eyes. In the morning he had confessed himself interested in her welfare; in the evening she had contrived to provoke him. That was something gained.

“He is not quite a block of stone!” she thought.

She did not trouble herself to come forward and welcome the Melvin party, any more than she had troubled herself to greet

Mr. Forde; but came strolling across the grass towards the tea-table presently when every one else was seated; the guests here and there under the chestnut branches, while Gertrude sat at the table dispensing the tea-cups, with Frederick Melvin in attendance. Mr. Melvin was the eldest son of the chief solicitor of Hawleigh, in partnership with his father, and vaguely supposed to be eligible from a matrimonial point of view. He was a young man who had an unlimited capacity for croquet, vingt-et-un, table-turning, and small flirtations; spent all his spare hours on the river Tabor, and seemed hardly at home out of a suit of boating flannels. He was indifferently in love with the four Miss Luttrells, with a respectful leaning towards Elizabeth, as the beauty; and he was generally absorbed by the flippant Blanche. His sister Laura sang well, and did nothing else to particularise herself in the minds of her acquaintance. She was fond of music and discoursed learnedly of symphonies and sonatas, adagios in C flat and capriccios in F double sharp, to the terror of the uninitiated. Miss Harrison was a cousin, whose people were of the gentleman-farmer persuasion, and who came from a sleepy old homestead up the country to stay with the Melvins, and intoxicate her young senses with the dissipations of Hawleigh market-place. The Melvins lived in the market-place, in a big square brick house picked out with white—a house with three rows of windows five in a row, a flight of steps, and a green door with a brass knocker; the very house, one would suppose, upon which all the dolls' houses ever manufactured have been modelled. She was not a very brilliant damsel, and when she had been asked how she liked Hawleigh after the country, and how she liked the country after Hawleigh, and whether she liked Hawleigh or the country best, conversation with her was apt to languish.

Mr. Forde, who was sitting a little in the background, talking to Mr. Luttrell, rose and gave his chair to Elizabeth—the last comer. He brought another for himself and sat down again, and went on with his talk; while Frederick Melvin worshipped at Elizabeth's shrine—offering tea, and pound-cake, and strawberries, and unutterable devotion.

“I wish you'd go and flirt with Blanche,” she said coolly. “No, thanks; I don't want any strawberries. Now, please, don't sprinkle a shower of them on my dress; I shall have to wear it a week. How awkward you are!”

“Who could help being awkward?” pleaded the youth, blushing. “Sir Charles Grandison would have made a fool of himself in your society.”

“I don't know anything about Sir Charles Grandison, and I don't believe you do, either. That's the way with you young men; you get the names of people and things out of the

Saturday Review, and pretend to know everything under the sun."

"Wasn't he a fellow in some book—*Pamela* or *Joseph Andrews*? something of Smollett's? some sort of rubbish in sixteen volumes? Nobody reads it now-a-days."

"Then I wouldn't quote it, if I were you. But the *Saturday Review* is the modern substitute for the Eton Latin Grammar. Please, go and flirt with Blanche. You always stand so close to one, making a door-mat of one's dress!"

"O, very well, I'll go and talk to Blanche. But remember"—this with a threatening air—"when you want to go on the Tabor——"

"You'll take me, of course. I know that. Run and play, that's a dear child!"

He was her senior by three years, but she gave herself ineffable airs of superiority notwithstanding. Perhaps she was not displeased to exhibit even this trumpery swain before the eyes of Malcolm Forde—who went on talking of parish matters with her father, as if unconscious of her presence. Very little execution was done upon the pound-cake or the syllabub. The atmosphere was too heavily charged with flirtations for any serious consumption of provisions. It is the people who have done with the flowers and sunshine of life who make most havoc among the lobster-salads and raised pies at a picnic—for whom the bouquet of the moselle is a question of supreme importance, who know the difference between a hawk and a heron in the way of claret.

So, after a little trifling with the dainty cates Miss Luttrell had hospitably provided, the young people rose for the business of the evening.

"Wouldn't you rather have a cigar and a glass of claret here, under the chestnut?" said Mr. Luttrell, as Malcolm Forde prepared to join them.

"That would be a breach of covenant," answered the Curate, laughing. "I was invited for croquet. Besides, I really enjoy the game; it's a sort of substitute for billiards."

"A dissipation you have renounced," said the Vicar, in his careless way. "You modern young men are regular Trappists!"

Whereby it will be seen that Wilmot Luttrell was of the Broad-Church party—a man who had hunted the Devonian red-deer in his time, who had still a brace of Joe Manton's in his study, was good at fly-fishing, and did not object to clerical billiards or a social rubber.

They played for a couple of hours in the balmy summer evening, the Luttrell girls and their four visitors—played till the sunlight faded into dusk, and the dusk deepened into the

soft June night—which was hardly night, but rather a tender mixture of twilight and starshine. Gertrude had taken Mr. Forde for the leader of her side, Miss Harrison and Blanche Luttrell making up their four. The Beauty headed a skirmishing party, that incorrigible Frederick for her supporter, Di Luttrell and Laura Melvin bringing up the rear. To her Malcolm Forde addressed no word throughout the little tournament. It may have been because he had no opportunity; for she was laughing and talking more or less all the time, in the wildest spirits, with the young solicitor perpetually at her elbow. And Gertrude had a great deal to say to the Curate; chiefly on the subject of her parish work, and a little of a more vague and metaphysical nature concerning the impressions produced upon her mind by his last Sunday-evening sermon. He listened kindly and respectfully, as in duty bound, but that frivolous talk and laughter upon the other side worried him not a little. Never had Elizabeth seemed to him so vulgarly provincial; and he was really interested in her, as indeed it was his duty to be interested in the welfare of his Vicar's daughters.

"It is all the father's fault," he said to himself; "I do not believe he has ever made the faintest attempt to train them."

And then he thought what an estimable young person Gertrude must be to have evolved out of her inner consciousness, as it were, all that serious and practical piety which made her so valuable to him in his ministrations. As to the future careers of the other three—of Blanche, who talked slang, and seemed to consider this lower world designed to be a perpetual theatre for flirtation; of Diana, who was selfish and idle, and set up a pretence of weak health as a means of escaping all the cares and perplexities of existence; of Elizabeth, who appeared in her own character to embody all the faults and weaknesses he had ever supposed possible to a woman—of the manner in which these three were to tread the troubled paths of life, he could only think with a shudder. Poor lampless virgins, straying blindly into the darkness!

Yet, measured by a simply sensuous standard, how sweet was that low rippling sound of girlish laughter; how graceful the white-robed figure moving lightly in the summer dusk; how exquisite the dark-blue eyes that looked at him in the starlight, when the game was ended, and the Church Militant, as Blanche said pertly, had been triumphant over the Devil's Own, in the person of the mild-eyed Frederick Melvin! Mr. Forde's unerring stroke, mathematically correct as the pendulum, had brought them home, in spite of some rather feeble playing on the part of Gertrude, whose mind was a little too much occupied by last Sunday-evening's sermon.

Mr. Luttrell had strolled up and down the garden walk.

smoking his cigar, and had loitered a little by the holly hedge talking to some people in the road, while the croquet players amused themselves. He came forward now to propose an adjournment to the house, and a claret-cup. So they all went crowding into a long low room with a couple of bow windows, a room which was lined with bookshelves on one side, containing Taylor and Hooker, and Barrow and Tillotson, and South and Venn, and other ecclesiastical volumes, freely intermingled with a miscellaneous collection of secular literature; a room which served Mr. Luttrell as a library, but which was nevertheless the drawing-room. There was a grand piano by one of the bow windows, a piano which had been presented to Diana by a wealthy aunt and godmother, and the brand-new walnut-wood case whereof was in strong contrast with the time-worn old chairs and tables; the cheffoniers of the early Georgian era; the ponderous old cane-seated sofa, with its chintz-covered pillows and painted frame—a pale, pale green picked out with gold that was fast vanishing away. The attenuated crystal girandoles upon the high wooden mantelshelf were almost as old as the invention of glass; the Chelsea shepherd and shepherdess had been cracked over and over again, but held together as if by a charmed existence. The Derbyshire-spa vases were relics of a dead-and-gone generation. The mock-venetian mirror was of an almost forgotten fashion and a quite extinct manufacture. Blanche vowed that Noah and his wife, when they kept house before the flood, must have had just such a drawing-room.

Yet this antiquated chamber seemed in no wise displeasing to the sight of Mr. Forde as he came in from the starlit garden. He liked it a great deal better than many finer rooms in which he was a rare but welcome visitor, just as he preferred the ill-kept Vicarage lawn and flower-borders to the geometrical parterres of millionaire cloth manufacturers or pompous squires on the outskirts of Hawleigh.

Frederick Melvin and his sister pleaded for a little music, upon which the usual family concert began: a showy fantasia by Gertrude, correctly played, with a good firm finger, and not a spark of expression from the first bar to the bang, bang, *bang!* at the end; then a canzonet from Blanche, of the "O, 'tis merry when the cherry and the blossom and the berry, tra-la-la-la, tra-la-la" school, in a thin little soprano; then a sonata—Beethoven's "Adieu"—by Miss Melvin, which Mr. Forde thought the longest adieu he had ever been obliged to listen to. He lost patience at last, and went over to Elizabeth, whose ripe round mezzo-soprano tones he languished to hear.

"Won't you sing something?" he asked.

"What, does not singing come within your catalogue of for-

bidden pleasures—a mere idle waste of time—lotos-eating, in short?”

“You know that I do not think anything of the kind. Why do you try to make me out what I have never pretended to be—an ascetic, or worse, a Pharisee? Is it only because I am anxious you should be of a little more use to your fellow-creatures?”

“And of course singing can be no use, unless I went about among your cottage people leading off hymns.”

“Does that mean that you won’t sing to-night?” he asked in his coldest tone.

“Yes.”

“Then I’ll wish you good-night. I’ve no doubt the music we’ve been hearing is very good in its way, but it’s hardly my way. Good-night. I’ll slip away quietly without disturbing your friends.”

He was close to the open bow-window, that farthest from the piano, and went out unnoticed, while Miss Melvin and her cousin Miss Harrison were debating whether they should or should not play the overture to *Zampa*. He went out of the window, and walked slowly across the grass, but had hardly reached the sun-dial, when he heard the voice he knew so well swell out rich and full in the opening tones of a ballad he loved, a plaintive lament called “Ettrick.”

“O, murmuring waters, have you no message for me?”

He stopped by the sun-dial and heard the song to the end; heard Fred Melvin supplicating for another song, and Elizabeth’s impatient refusal—“She was tired to death,” with a little nervous laugh.

He went away after this, not offended, only wondering that any woman could be so wilful, could take so much pains to render herself unwomanly and unlovable. He thought how keenly another man, whose life was differently planned, might have felt this petty slight—how dangerous to such a man’s peace Elizabeth Luttrell might have been; but that was all. He was not angry with her.

What would he have thought, if he could have seen Elizabeth Luttrell half an hour later that night, if he could have seen her fall on her knees by one of the little French beds in the room that she and Blanche occupied together, and bury her face in the counterpane and burst into a passion of tears?

“What is the matter, Liz—what is it, darling?” cries Blanche the impulsive.

The girl answers nothing, but sobs out her brief passion, and then rises, calm as a statue, to confront her sister.

“If you are going to worry me, Blanche, I shall sleep in the

passage," she exclaims in impatient rebuke of the other's sympathetic caress. "There's nothing the matter. I'm tired, that's all, and that absurd Fred of yours has persecuted me so all the evening."

"He's no Fred of mine, and I think you rather encouraged his persecutions," said Blanche with an aggrieved air. "I'm sure I can't make you out, Lizzie. I thought you liked Mr. Forde, and yet you quite snubbed him to-night."

"Snubbed him," cried Elizabeth. "As if anybody could snub St. Paul!"

CHAPTER III.

"I know thy forms are studied arts,
 Thy subtle ways be narrow straits;
 Thy courtesy but sudden starts,
 And what thou call'st thy gifts are baits."

THE Curate of Hawleigh, modest in his surroundings as the incorruptible Maximilian Robespierre himself, had lodgings at a carpenter's. His landlord was certainly the chief carpenter of the town, a man of unblemished respectability, who had even infused a flavour of building into his trade; but the Curate's bedroom windows commanded a view of the carpenter's yard, and he lived in the odour of chips and shavings, and that fresh piney smell which seems to breathe the perfume of a thousand ships far away from the barren main. He had even to submit meekly to the dismal tap, tap, tap of the hammer when a coffin was on hand, which might fairly serve as a substitute for the "*Frère il faut mourir!*" of the Trappist brotherhood.

It must not be supposed, however, that this choice of a lodging was an act of asceticism or wanton self-humiliation upon the part of Malcolm Forde. The Hawleigh curates lodged, as a rule, with Humphreys the carpenter: and Hawleigh being self-governed, for the most part, upon strictly conservative principles, it would have been an outrage against the sacred existing order of things if Mr. Forde had pitched his tent elsewhere. Mrs. Humphreys was a buxom middle-aged woman of spotless cleanliness, who kept a cow in a neat little paddock behind the carpenter's yard; a woman who had a pleasant odour of dairy about her, and who was supposed by long practice to have acquired a special faculty for "doing for curates."

"I know their tastes," she would say to her gossips, "and

it's astonishing how little their tastes varies. 'O, give me a chop, Mrs. Humphreys,' they mostly says, if I werrit them about their dinner. But, lor, I know better than that. Their poor stomachs would soon turn against chops if they had them every day. So I soon leaves off asking 'em anything about dinner, and contrives to give 'em a nice variety of tasty little dishes—a whiting and a lamb cutlet or two with fried parsley one day; a red mullet and a split fowl broiled with half-a-dozen mushroome the next, a spitchcock, *they* call it; and then the day after I curry what's left of the fowl, so as their bills come moderate; and I never had a wry word with any curate yet, except Mr. Adderley, who didn't like squab-pie, and I did give him a piece of my mind about *that*."

The rooms were comfortable rooms, though of the plainest: lightsome and airy; furnished with chairs and tables so substantial that their legs had not been enfeebled by the various fidgetinesses of a whole generation of curates: honest wide-seated leather-bottomed chairs bought at the sack of an ancient manor-house; stalwart walnut-wood tables and brass-handled chests of drawers made when George the Second was king. Mrs. Humphreys was wont to boast that her Joe—meaning Mr. Joseph Humphreys—knew what chairs and tables were, and did not choose them for their looks. There were no ornaments of the usual lodging-house type, for Mrs. Humphreys knew that it is in the nature of curates to bring with them sundry nicknacks, the relics of university extravagances, wherewith to decorate their chambers.

Mr. Forde had furnished both sitting-room and bedroom amply with books, nay even the slip of a chamber where he kept his baths and sponges and bootstand was enumbered with the shabbier volumes in his collection, piled breast-high in the angles of the walls. He was not a collector of bric-à-brac, and the sole ornaments of his sitting-room were a brass skeleton clock which had travelled many a league with him in his soldiering days; a carefully painted miniature of an elderly lady, whom, by the likeness to himself, one might reasonably suppose to be his mother, on one side of the mantelpiece; a somewhat faded daguerreotype of a sweet fair young face on the other; and a breakfast cup and saucer on a little ebony stand under a glass shade. Why this cup and saucer should be so preserved would have been a puzzling question for a stranger. They were of ordinary modern china, and could have possessed no value from an artistic point of view.

He had performed his early morning duty at St. Clement's, and spent half an hour with a sick parishioner, before his nine-o'clock breakfast on the day following that little croquet party at the Vicarage. He was dawdling a little as he sipped his

second cup of tea, with one of Southey's *Commonplace Books* open at his elbow, turning over the leaves now and then with a somewhat absent air, as if in all that jetsam and flotsam of the poet's studious hours he hardly found a paragraph to enchain his attention.

What manner of man is he, in outward semblance, as he sits there absent and meditative, with the broad summer daylight on his face? It would be a question if one should call him a handsome man. He is distinguished-looking, perhaps, rather than handsome; tall and broad-shouldered, like the men who come from beyond the Tweed; straight as a dart; a man who is not dependent upon dress and surroundings for his dignity, but has an indefinable air of being superior to the common herd. His features are good, but not particularly regular, hardly coming within the rule and compass of archetypal beauty; the nose a thought too broad, the forehead too dominant. His skin is dark, and has little colour, save when he is angry or deeply moved, when the stern face glows briefly with a dark crimson. The clear cold gray eyes are wonderful in their variety of expression. The firmly-moulded yet flexible mouth is the best feature in his face, supremely grave in repose, infinitely tender when he smiles.

He smiles suddenly now, in the course of his reverie, for it is clear enough that he is thinking, and not reading Southey's agreeable jottings, though his hand mechanically turns the leaves. He smiles a slow thoughtful smile.

"What a child she is," he says to himself, "with all a child's perversity! I am foolish ever to be angry with her."

He heard a double-knock from the little brass knocker of Mr. Humphreys' private door, shut his book with an impatient sigh, got up and walked to the window. The Humphreys' mansion was in one of the side streets of Hawleigh, a street known by the rustic title of Field-lane, which led up a gentle hill to the open country; a vast stretch of common-land, sprinkled sparsely on the outskirts with a few scattered houses and a row or two of cottages. Nor had Mr. Humphreys any opposite neighbours; the houses on the other side stopped abruptly a few yards below, and there was a triangular green, with a pond and a colony of ducks in front of the Curate's casements.

Malcolm Forde looked out of the window, expecting to see his visitor waiting meekly on the spotless doorstep; but the door had been opened promptly, and the doorstep was unoccupied. He looked at his watch hastily.

"I've been wasting too much time already," he said to himself, "and here is some one to detain me ever so long. And I want to make a good morning's round out Filbury way."

The medical practitioners of Hawleigh prided themselves on

the crushing nature of their duties, yet there were none among them who worked so hard as this healer of souls. Here was some tiresome vestryman, perhaps, come to prose for half an hour or so about some pet grievance, while he was languishing to be up and doing among the miserable hovels at Filbury, where, amidst the fertile smiling landscape, men's souls and bodies were consuming away with a moral dry-rot.

The door of his sitting-room opened, but not to admit a prosing vestryman. The smiling handmaiden announced "Miss Luttrell, if you please, sir." And, lo, there stood before him on the threshold of his chamber the wilful woman he had been thinking about just now, gravely regarding him, the very image of decorum.

There was some change in her outward aspect, the details whereof his masculine eye could not distinguish. A woman could have told him in a moment by what means the Beauty had contrived to transform herself. She was dressed in a lavender-cotton gown, with tight plain sleeves, and a linen collar—no bright-hued ribbon encircling the long white throat, no flutter of lace or glimmer of golden locket, none of the pretty frivolities with which she was accustomed to set-off her loveliness. She wore an old-fashioned black-silk scarf, a relic of her dead mother's wardrobe, which became her tall slim figure to perfection. She, who was wont to wear the most coquettish and capricious of hats, the daintiest conceit in airy tulle by way of a bonnet, was now crowned with a modest saucer-shaped thing of Dunstable straw, which at this moment hid her eyes altogether from Malcolm Forde. The rich brown hair, which she had been accustomed to display in an elaborate structure of large loose plaits, was neatly braided under this Puritan head-gear, and packed into the smallest possible compass at the back of her head. She had a little basket in one hand, a red-covered account-book in the other.

"If you please, Mr. Forde, I should like you to give me a round of visits amongst your poor people," she said, offering him this little volume. "I am quite ready to begin my duties to-day."

He stood for a moment gazing at her, lost in amazement. The provoking saucer-shaped hat covered her eyes. He could only guess the expression of her face from her mouth, which was gravity itself.

"What, Miss Luttrell, do you mean to help me, after all you said last night?"

"Did I really say anything very wicked last night?" she asked naively, lifting her head for a moment so that her eyes shone out at him under the shadow of the saucer-brim. Peerless eyes they seemed to him in that brief flash, but hardly the

most appropriate eyes for a district-visitor, whose beauty should be of a subdued order, like the colours of her dress.

"I don't know that you said anything wicked; but you expressed a profound disgust for district-visiting."

"Did I? It was the last rebellious murmur of my unregenerate heart. But you have awakened my conscience, and I mean to turn over a new leaf, to begin a new existence in fact. If the piano were my property instead of Diana's, I think I should make a bonfire on the lawn and burn it. I have serious thoughts of burning my colour box—Winsor and Newton's too, and papa's last birthday present. But you must be kind enough to make me out a list of the people you'd like me to visit. I don't want to be a regular district-visitor, or to interfere with your established sisterhood in any way; so I won't take any tickets to distribute. I don't want the people to associate me with sacramental alms. I want to have a little flock of my own, and to see if I can make them like me for my own sake, without thinking how much they can get out of me. And if you could coach me a little about what I ought to say to them, it would be a great comfort to me. Gertrude says that when she feels herself at a loss she says a little prayer, and waits on the doorstep for a few minutes, till something comes to her. But I'm afraid that plan would not answer for me."

Mr. Forde pushed one of the heavy chairs to the writing-table near the window, and asked Miss Luttrell to sit down while he wrote what she wanted in the little red book. She seated herself near one end of the table, and he sat down to write at the other.

"I shall be very happy to do what I can to set you going," he said, as he wrote; "but I should be more assured of your sincerity if you were less disposed to make a joke of the business."

"A joke!" exclaimed Miss Luttrell with an aggrieved air, "why, I was never in my life so serious. Is this the way in which you mean to treat my awakening, Mr. Forde?"

He handed her the little book, with a list of names written on the first leaf. "I think you must know something of these people," he said, "after living here all your life."

"Please don't take anything for granted about me with reference to the poor," she answered hastily. "Of course it is abominable in me to admit as much, but I never have cared for them. The only ideas about them that I have ever been able to grasp are, that they never open their windows, and that they always want something of one, and take it ill if one can't give them the thing they want. Gertrude tells quite a different story, and declares that the serious-minded souls are always languishing for spiritual refreshment, that she can make them quite happy with her prim little sermons and flimsy little tracts,

Did you ever read a tract, Mr. Forde? I don't mean a controversial pamphlet, or anything of that kind; but just one of those little puritanical booklets that drop from Gertrude like leaves from a tree in autumn?"

"I have not given much leisure to that kind of study," replied Malcolm, with his grave smile. "I hope you won't think me unappreciative of the honour involved in this visit, Miss Luttrell, if I am obliged to run away. I have a round of calls at Filbury to get through this morning."

"You remind me of poor mamma," said Elizabeth, with a tributary sigh to the memory of that departed parent; "she had always a round of calls, and they generally resolved themselves into three—a triangle of calls, in short. But they were genteel visits, you know. Mamma never went in for the district business."

The loose slangy style of her talk grated upon his ear not a little. He took his hat and gloves from the sideboard—a gentle reminder that he was in haste to be gone.

"I won't detain you five minutes more," she said. "How nice the room looks with all those books! I know Mrs. Humphreys' drawing-room very well, though this is my first visit to you. Papa and Gertrude and I came once to drink tea with Mr. Horton. He gave quite a party; and we had concertante duets for the flute and piano—'Non piu mesta,' and 'Di piacer.' and so on," this with a faint blush, remembering her own share in that concerted music. "You should have seen the room in his tenancy—Bohemian-glass vases, and scent caskets, and stereoscopes, and photograph albums; but very few books. I think I like it best with all those grim-looking brown-backed volumes of yours."

She made the tour of the room as she spoke, and paused by the mantelpiece to examine the skeleton clock, the cup and saucer, the two portraits.

"What a grand-looking old lady!—your mother, of course, Mr. Forde? And, O, what a sweet face!" pausing before the photograph. "Your sister, I suppose?"

"No," Mr. Forde answered, somewhat shortly.

"And what a pretty cup and saucer, under a glass shade! It looks like a relic of some kind."

"It is a relic."

The tone was grave, repellent even, and Elizabeth felt she had touched upon a forbidden subject.

"It belonged to his mother, I daresay," she thought; "and he keeps it in memory of the dead. I suppose all his people are dead, as he never talks about them."

After this she made haste to depart with her little book, knowing very well that she had outraged all the convention-

alities of Hawleigh, but rather proud of having bearded this lion of Judah in his den.

Mr. Forde left the house with her, and walked a little way by her side; but was graver and more silent than his wont, as if he had hardly recovered from the pain those injudicious questions of hers had given him. He parted from her at the entrance to a row of cottages, in which dwelt two of the matrons whose names he had entered in her book.

"Good-bye," he said. "I hope you will be able to do some good, and that you will not be tired of the work in a week or two."

"That's rather a depressing suggestion," said Elizabeth. "I know you have the worst possible opinion of me; but I mean to show you how mistaken you have been. And you really ought to feel flattered by my conversion. Papa might have preached at me for a twelvemonth without producing such an effect."

"I am sorry to hear that your father has so little influence with you, Miss Luttrell," the Curate answered gravely.

He left her with the coldest good-bye. The proud face flushed crimson under the mushroom hat as she turned into the little alley. This morning's interview had not been nearly so agreeable to her as yesterday's lecture under the limes at the entrance to the town. She began her missionary work in a very bad humour; but brightened by degrees as she went on. She was a woman in whom the desire to please dominated almost every other attribute, and she was bent upon making these people like or even love her. It was not to be a mere spurt, this adoption of a new duty. She meant to show Malcolm Forde that she could be all, or more than all, he thought a woman should be—that she could be as much Gertrude's superior in this particular line as she surpassed her in personal beauty.

"Gertrude!" she said to herself contemptuously. "As if poor people could possibly care about Gertrude, with her little fidgety ways, and her Low-Church tracts, and her passion for soapsuds and hearthstone! She has contrived to train her people into a subdued kind of civility. They look upon her visits as a necessary evil, and put up with them, just as they put up with the water coming through the roof, or a pig-stye close to the parlour window. But I shall make my people look forward to my visits as a bright little spot in their lives."

This was rather an arrogant idea, perhaps; but Elizabeth Luttrell succeeded in realising it. She contrived to win an unflinching welcome in the twenty cottages which Mr. Forde had assigned to her. Nor was her popularity won by bribery and corruption. She had very little to give her people, except

an occasional packet of barley-sugar or a paper of biscuits for the children, or now and then some cast-off ribbon or other scrap of genteel finery for the mothers. For the sick children, indeed, she would do anything—empty her own slenderly-furnished purse, rob the cross old parsonage cook of her arrow-root, and loaf-sugar, and isinglass, and cornflour, and ground rice, and Epps's cocoa, and new-laid eggs; but it was not by gifts of any kind that she made herself beloved. It was the brightness and easy grace of her manner rather, that delightful air of being perfectly at home in a tiny chamber with a reeking washtub at her elbow, a cradle at her knee, and a line of damp clothes steaming in close proximity to her hat. Nothing disgusted her. She never wondered that people could live in such dirt and muddle. She made her little suggestions of improvement—no blunt plain-spoken recommendation of soap-suds and hearthstone, but insinuating hints of what might be done with a little trouble—in a manner that never offended. And then she was so beautiful to look upon; the husbands and wives were never tired of admiring her. "Ay, but she be a rale right-down beauty," they said, "and thinks no more of herself than if she was as ugly as sin;" not knowing that the fair Elizabeth was quite conscious of her own loveliness, and hoped to turn it to some good account by-and-by.

Nor did Elizabeth forget, in her desire for popularity, that the chief object of her mission among these people was of a spiritual kind: that she was to carry enlightenment and religion into those close pent-up hovels where the damp linen was ever dangling, the washtub for ever reeking; where the larder was so often barren, and the wants of mankind so small and yet sometimes perforce unsatisfied. Although she was not herself, as Gertrude expressed it, "seriously minded," though her thoughts during her father's sermons, and even during those of Mr. Forde, too often wandered among the bonnets and mantles of the congregation, or shaped themselves into vague visions of the future, she did notwithstanding contrive to bring about some improvement in the theory and practice of her clients. She persuaded the women to go to church on Sunday evenings, if Sunday-morning worship was really an impossible thing, as the poor souls protested; she induced the husbands to clean themselves a couple of hours earlier than had been their Sabbath custom, and to shamle into the dusky aisle of St. Clement's or St. Mary's while the tinkling five-minutes bell was still calling to loiterers and laggards on the way; she taught the little ones their catechism, rewarding proficiency with barley-sugar or gingerbread; and she sat by many a washtub reading the Evangelists in her full sweet voice, while the industrious housewife rubbed the sweats of labour from her

husband's shirt-collars. She would even starch and iron a handful of collars herself, on occasion, if the housewife seemed to set about the business clumsily.

"I have to get-up my own fine things sometimes, or I should go cuffless and collarless," she said. "Papa is not rich, you know, Mrs. Jones." Whereat Mrs. Jones would be struck with amazement by her handiness.

"I don't believe there's a thing in this 'varsal world as you can't do, Miss Elizabeth," the admiring matron would cry with uplifted hands; and even this humble appreciation of her merits pleased Lizzie Luttrell.

Her reading was much liked by listeners who were not compelled to sit with folded hands and a brain perplexed by the thought of neglected housework. She had a knack of choosing the most attractive as well as the most profitable portions of Holy Writ, an acute perception of the passages most likely to impress her hearers.

"I do like *your* Scriptures, Miss Elizabeth," said one woman. "When I was a gal, I used to think the Bible was all Saul and the Philistings—there seemed no end of 'em—and David. I make no doubt David was a dear good man, and after the Lord's own heart; but there did seem too much of him. He wasn't like Him as you read about; he didn't come home to us like that, miss, and you don't read as *he* was fond of little children, except that one of his own that he was so wrapt up in."

"The Gospel sounds like a pretty story, when you read it, miss," said another; "and when Miss Gertrude read, it did seem so sing-soug like. Sometimes I couldn't feel as there was any sense in it, no more than in the Lessons of a hot summer's afternoon, when it seems only a droning, like a hive of bees."

So Elizabeth went on and prospered, and grew really interested in her work. It was not half so bad as she had supposed. There was muddle, and there was want, but not such utter gloom and misery as she had imagined in these hovels. The spirits of these people were singularly elastic. Ever so little sunshine warmed them into new life; and, above all, they liked her, and praised her, and spoke well of her to Malcolm Forde. She knew that from his approving manner, not from anything he had distinctly said upon the subject.

Rarely had she met with him on her rounds. The list he had given her included only easy subjects—people who would not be likely to repulse her attentions, homes in which she would not hear foul language or see dreadful sights—and having allotted her path-way, he was content that she should follow it with very little assistance from him, and even took pains to time his own visits, so as to avoid any encounter with her.

He did, however, on rare occasions find her among his flock. Not easily did he forget one summer afternoon, when he saw her sitting by an open cottage window with a sick child in her lap. That figure in a pale muslin dress, with the afternoon sunshine upon it, lived in his memory long.

"If I could only believe that she was quite in earnest," he said to himself, "that this new work of hers has some safer charm than its novelty, I should think her the sweetest woman I ever met—except one."

Elizabeth had been engaged in these duties for two months, and had done her work faithfully. It was the end of August, the brilliant close of a summer that had been exceptionally fine; harvest just begun in this western land, and occasional tracts of tawny stubble baking under a cloudless blue sky; hazel-nuts and wortle-berries ripening in the woods; great sloe-trees shedding their purple fruit in every hedge; a rain of green apples falling on the orchard grass with every warm south wind; the red plums swelling and purpling on the garden wall—a vision of plenty and the perfume of roses and carnations on every side.

"If we don't have that picnic you talked about very soon, Gerty, we shan't have it at all," remarked the youngest and the pertest of the four sisters at breakfast one morning, when Mr. Luttrell had withdrawn himself to his daily duties, and the damsels were left to enjoy half an hour's idleness and talk over empty coffee-cups and shattered eggshells and other fragments of the feast. "The summer's nearly over, you see, Gerty, and if we don't take care we shall lose all the fine weather. I've no doubt there'll be a deluge after all this sunshine."

Blanche always called her eldest sister "Gerty" when she wanted some indulgence from that important personage.

"Well, I'm sure I don't know what to say, Blanche," replied Miss Luttrell with provoking coolness, as if picnics and all such sublunary pleasures were utterly beneath her regard; strong, too, in her authority as her father's housekeeper, and conscious that her sisters must bow down and pay her homage for whatever they wanted, like Joseph's brethren in quest of corn. "I really think," she went on with a deliberate air, "as the summer is nearly gone, we may as well give up any notion of a picnic this year, especially as papa doesn't seem to care much about it."

"Papa never seems to care about anything that costs money," cried the disrespectful youngest. "He'd like life well enough if everything in it could be carried on for nothing; if his children could be born and educated, and fed and clothed—"

and doctored and nursed, and introduced to society gratis, so that he could have all the pew-rents and burial-fees and things to put in the bank. It's very mean of you to talk like that, Gertrude, and want to sneak out of the picnic, when it's about the only return we're likely to make for all the croquet parties and dinners and teas and goodness knows what that our friends have given us since Christmas."

"Really, Blanche, you are learning to render yourself eminently disagreeable," Miss Luttrell observed severely, "and I fear if papa does not face the necessity of sending you back to school to be finished, your deficiency in manner will be your absolute ruin in after-life."

"Never mind Blanche's manner," interposed Diana, "but let's talk about the picnic. Of course we must have one. We always have had one for the last five years, since the summer after poor mamma's death,—I know we were all in slight mourning at the first of them,—and our friends expect it. So the only question is, where are we to go this year?"

This was intended in some wise as an assertion of independence on the part of the second Miss Luttrell, who did not intend to be altogether overridden by the chariot of an elder sister, even though that elder had bidden a long farewell to the golden summer-tide of her twenty-eighth year.

"Elizabeth won't go, of course, now she's turned serious," said Blanche, with a sly glance at Lizzie, who sat leisurely watching the skirmish, with her head against the clumsy frame of the lattice, and the south wind gently stirring her dark-brown hair, a perfect picture of idle loveliness.

"You'll have nothing to do with the picnic, of course, Lizzie, not even if Malcolm Forde goes," pursued the "Pickle" of the family.

"Who gave you leave to call him Malcolm?" flashed out Elizabeth.

"No one; but why shouldn't one enjoy oneself in the bosom of one's family. I like to call him Malcolm Forde, it's such a pretty name; and one ought to get accustomed to the Christian name of one's future brother-in-law."

Two of the Miss Luttrells flushed crimson at this speech: Gertrude, who turned angrily upon the speaker, as if about to retort; and Elizabeth, whose swift reply came like a flash of lightning, before her senior could reprove the offender.

"How dare you say that, Blanche? Do you suppose that I would marry Mr. Forde—a Curate—even if he were to ask me?"

"I won't suppose anything till he does ask you," answered the incorrigible; "and then I know pretty well what will happen. Whatever fine notions you may have had about a rich husband, and a house in London, and an opera-box, and

goodness knows what, will all count for nothing the day that Malcolm Forde makes you an offer. Why, you worship the ground he walks on. Do you think we can't all of us see through your district-visiting? A pretty freak for you to take up, after admitting that you detested such work!"

"I suppose it is not quite unnatural that one should try to overcome one's dislikes, and to do some good in the world," replied Elizabeth with dignity. "Have the goodness to bridle your tongue a little, Blanche; and rest assured that I shall never marry a Curate, be he whom he may."

"But Mr. Forde is not like common Curates. He is independent of the Church. He has private means."

"Yes; three or four hundred a year from a small estate in Aberdeenshire."

"O, you have been making inquiries, then?"

"No; but I heard papa say as much, one day. And now, Blanche, be so kind as to abandon the discussion of my affairs, and of Mr. Forde's, and let us talk of the picnic. I say Lawborough Beeches."

This "I say" was uttered in a tone of authority, unbecoming a third sister; and Gertrude immediately determined not to brook any such usurpation; but it somehow generally happened that Elizabeth had her own way. She had a happy knack of suggesting the right thing.

"Lawborough Beeches is a jolly place!" said Blanche approvingly.

"When will you learn to abandon the use of that odious adjective?" cried Gertrude with a shudder. "Lawborough Beeches is low and damp."

"Well, I'd as soon have it on the moor, and we could have donkey races and no end of fun."

"Was there ever a girl with such vulgar ideas? Donkey races? Imagine Mr. Forde riding a donkey with a piece of white calico on its back! And imagine picnicking on the moor, without a vestige of shade! A nice blistered state our faces would be in! and I should have one of my nervous headaches," said Diana, who had a kind of copyright in several interesting ailments of the nervine type.

Lawborough Beeches was a little wood of ancient trees, with silver-gray trunks and spreading crests; beeches which had been pollarded in the days when Cromwell rode rough-shod over the land, and had stretched out their mighty limbs low and wide in the centuries that had gone by since then. It was a little wood lying in a green hollow, through which the Tabor meandered—a silvery stream dear to the soul of the fly-fisher; here dark and placid as a lake, under the broad shadow of the trees; there flowing with swift current towards the distant weir.

Miss Luttrell acknowledged somewhat unwillingly, after a good deal of discussion, that the Beeches was perhaps the best place for the picnic, if the picnic were really a social necessity.

"I must confess that I do not see it in that light," she said, "and I rather wonder that you should do so, Elizabeth, now that your mind has been awakened to loftier interests. The sum which this picnic will cost would be a great help to our blanket club next winter."

Elizabeth pondered for a few moments. Of course she was anxious to help those poor people who were so fond of her; but the winter was a long way off. Providence might increase her means in some unthought-of manner by that time. And the near delight of a long summer afternoon with Malcolm Forde under Lawborough Beeches was very sweet to her. She had seen so little of him of late. The very change in herself, which she had fancied would bring them nearer together, seemed to have only the more divided them. She did not meet him half so often as in her unregenerate days, when she had been always strolling in and out of Hawleigh, to change books at the library; or to buy a new song, or a yard or two of ribbon; or to look at the last Paris fashions, which the chief linendraper had just received—from Plymouth.

"We ought to make some return for people's hospitality," she said. "I consider the picnic unavoidable."

So Blanche produced a sheet of foolscap, and began to make out a formidable list of comestibles: pigeon-pies, chicken-salads, lobsters, plovers' eggs, galantine of veal, hams, tongues, salmon *en mayonnaise*, and so on, with a wild profusion that seems so easy in pen-and-ink.

"I wish you would not be so officious, Blanche," exclaimed the eldest Miss Luttrell. "Of course, I shall arrange all those details with Susan Sims."

Susan Sims was the cook—an important functionary in the Vicar's household—who managed Miss Luttrell.

"That means that we are to have whatever Susan likes to give us!" said Blanche. "You do give way to her so, Gertrude. I think I'd rather have a bad cook, and one's dinner spoilt occasionally, if one could order just what one liked. However, I suppose, if I mayn't make out a list of the dinner, I may make a list of the people?"

"Yes, you can, if you'll take your inkstand to another table. You've made a blot upon the table-cloth already."

Upon this, the three elder damsels separated to pursue their divers occupations: Gertrude to hold solemn converse with Susan Sims; Diana to practise Mendelssohn's sonatas on the drawing-room piano; Elizabeth to her district-visiting; leaving Blanche wallowing in ink, and swelling with importance, as she

wrote the names of her father's friends on two separate sheets of foolscap—the people who must be invited upon one, the people who might or might not be invited upon the other.

Mr. Luttrell happened to be at home for luncheon that day—a privilege which he was not permitted to enjoy more than once or twice a week—so the sisters were able to moot the question of the picnic without delay.

The Vicar rubbed his bald forehead thoughtfully, with a perplexed sigh.

“I suppose we must do something,” he said dolefully. “It's a long time since we've had a dinner-party; and if you think people really like their dinner any better on damp grass, Gertrude, and with flies dropping into their wine, why, have a picnic by all means. There's always an immense deal of wine drunk at these affairs, by the way; young men are so officious, and go opening bottles on the least provocation. Be sure you remind me to write and order some of the Ball-supper Champagne and the Racecourse Moselle we saw advertised the other day.”

The matter was settled, therefore, pleasantly enough, and the invitations were written that afternoon, and distributed before nightfall by the parsonage gardener or man-of-all-work, Mr. Forde's invitation among them; a formal little note in Gertrude's hand, which he twisted about in his fingers for a long time while he meditated upon his answer.

Would it do him any good to waste a summer day under Lawborough Beeches? He had been working his hardest for some weeks without relaxation of any kind. He felt that he wanted rest and ease; but hardly this species of recreation, which would involve a great deal of trouble; for he would be required to make himself agreeable to all manner of people—to carry umbrellas and camp-stools; to point out interesting objects in the landscape; to quote the county history—and, in fact, to labour assiduously for the pleasure of other people. Nor had he ever felt himself any the better for these rustic pleasures; considerably the worse rather, especially when they were shared with Elizabeth Luttrell.

No; better to waste his day in utter loneliness on the moor, under the shadow of a mighty tor, with a book lying unread at his side. Better to give himself a pause of perfect rest, in which to think out the great problem of his life. For without inordinate self-esteem, Malcolm Forde was a man who deemed that his existence ought to be of some use to the world, that he was destined to fill some place in the scheme of creation. He felt that *al-fresco* banquetings and junketings were just the idlest, most worthless use that he could make of his rare leisure; and yet, with very human inconsistency, he wrote to Miss Luttrell next morning to accept her kind invitation.

CHAPTER IV.

“ O you gods !

Why do you make us love your goodly gifts,
And snatch them straight away ? We, here below,
Recall'not what we give, and therein may
Vie honour with yourselves.”

A PERFECT lull in the summer winds, a sultry silence in the air ; Tabor lying stilly under the beeches, dark and polished as a mirror of Damascus steel, not a bulrush on its margin, not a lily trembling on its bosom. There seemed almost a profanity in happy talk and laughter in that silent wood, where the great beeches that were crop-eared by Cromwell spread their gnarled limbs under the hot blue sky.

Mr. Luttrell's party, however, do not pause in their mirth to consider the fitness of things. It boots not them to ask whether Lawborough Beeches be not a scene more suited to Miltonic musings than to the consumption of lobster-salad and galantine de veau. They ask each other for salt, and bread, and bitter ale, while the lark pierces the topmost heavens with purest melody. They set champagne corks flying against the giant beechen trunks. They revel in clotted cream and syllabub, and small talk and flirtation, amidst the solemn shadows of that leafy dell ; and then, when they have spent nearly two hours in a business-like absorption of solids and fluids, or in playing trifling with the lightest of the viands, as the case may be, the picnickers abandon the scene of the banquet, and wander away in little clusters of three or four, or in solitary couples, dispersing themselves throughout the wood, nay even beyond, to a broad stretch of rugged heath that borders it on one side, or to the slope of a hill which shelters it on the other. Some tempt the dangers of smooth-faced Tabor in Fred Melvin's trim-built wherry, or in the punt which has conveyed a brace of Oxonians, James and Horace Elgood, the sons of one of the squires whose broad pastures border the town of Hawleigh.

Mr. Melvin has been anxious that Elizabeth should trust herself upon that silver flood.

“ You know you're fond of boating,” he pleads ; “ and if you naven't seen much of the Tabor this way, it's worth your while to come. The banks are a picture—no end of flowers—‘ I know a bank whereon the wild thyme grows,’ and that kind of thing. One would think Shakespeare had taken his notion from hereabouts.”

“ As if the Avon had no thymy banks ! ” exclaimed Elizabeth contemptuously. “ I don't care about boating this afternoon, thank you, Mr. Melvin. I am going for a walk.”

She glanced at Malcolm Forde as she spoke, almost pleadingly, as if she would have said, Give me one idle hour of your life. They had sat apart at the banquet, Gertrude having contrived to keep the Curate at her side; they had travelled from Hawleigh in different carriages, and had exchanged hardly half a dozen sentences up to this stage of the entertainment. It seemed to Elizabeth as if they were fated never to be together. Already she began to think the picnic a failure. "I only wanted it for the sake of being with him," she said to herself hopelessly.

And here was that empty-headed Fred Melvin worrying her to go in his boat, while Malcolm Forde stood by, leaning against the gray trunk of a pollard willow, listlessly gazing at the river, and said never a word.

"Let Forde punt you down the river as far as the weir," cried one of the Oxonians, coming unconsciously to her relief. "There's an empty punt lying idle yonder, the one that brought the Towers party; and Forde was one of the best punters at Oxford."

Mr. Forde had gone up for his degree at a late stage of his existence, after he left the army, and his repute was known to these youngsters.

"There's nothing like a punt in this kind of weather, Miss Luttrell," said the Oxonian, as he rolled up his shirt-sleeves and prepared himself to convey a boatload of young ladies in voluminous muslin skirts; "such a nice lazy way of getting along."

He stood up high above his freight, plunged his pole deep into the quiet water, and skimmed athwart the river with a slow noiseless motion soothing to see upon a summer afternoon, while Elizabeth was silently blessing him.

Mr. Forde did at last awake from his reverie.

"Shall I get the punt?" he asked; "and will you come?"

"I should like it of all things," she answered gently. She was not going to hazard the loss of this perfect happiness by any ill-timed coquetry. Yes, it was perfect happiness to be with him. She acknowledged as much as that to herself, if she did not acknowledge any more.

"I suppose I think so much of him simply because he thinks nothing of me," she said to herself musingly, while Mr. Forde had gone a little way down the bank to fetch the punt.

He came back presently, with his coat off and his sleeves rolled up like the Oxonian's, skilfully navigating his rude bark with lengthy vigorous arms that had pulled in the university eight. It was the first time that Elizabeth had seen him on the river, and she wondered a little to find him master of this secular accomplishment. He brought the broad stem of the punt against the bank at her feet.

"Wouldn't your sister Blanche like to go with us?" he asked.

looking round in quest of that young lady. But Blanche had gone off in the wherry with the Melvin set—Miss Pooley, the doctor's daughter; the Miss Cumdens, the rich manufacturer's daughters; Captain Danvers, and Mr. Pynsent. Shrill laughter sounded from the reedy shores beyond the sharp curve of the river. Even James Elgood's punt was out of sight. They had the river all to themselves. Utter loneliness seemed to have come upon the scene. The sound of that shrill laughter dwindled and died away, and these two stood alone in the sweet summer silence, between sunlight and shadow, on the brink of deep still Tabor.

Elizabeth lingered on the bank, doubtful whether it would not be the proper course to wait for some stray reveller to join them before she took her place in the boat. A *tête-à-tête* excursion with Mr. Forde would entail sundry lectures from Gertrude, a general sense of disapproval perhaps in her small world. But Malcolm Forde stretched out his strong arm and calmly handed her into the punt. It was quite a luxurious kind of boat, as punts go, provided with a red cushion on one of the broad clumsy seats, and a tin vessel for bailing out unnecessary water.

She seated herself in the stern, and they drifted away slowly, softly over the still blue water. It was the first time they had been together, and alone, since the morning when she called upon him at his lodgings.

For some time there was silence, sweet silence, only broken by the hum of insect life around them, and the skylark's song in the clear vault above. The navigation of a punt is not a very difficult business; but it requires some attention, and Tabor's windings involved some small amount of care in the navigation. This made a fair excuse for Mr. Forde's silence, and Elizabeth was content—content to watch the dark thoughtful face, the firmly-cut profile, the deep gray eyes, grave almost to severity; content to ponder on his life, wondering if it were hard work and careful thought for others that had blanched the ruddier tints from his somewhat sunken cheek, or whether he was by nature pale; wondering if that grave dignity, which made him different from the common race of curates, were an earnest of future eminence, if he were verily born to greatness, and a bishopric awaiting him in the days to come; wondering idly about this thing and that, her fancies playing round him, like the flickering shadows on his figure as the boat shot under the trees, and she supremely content to be in his company. Perhaps, since she had more than all a woman's faults and weaknesses, it may have been some gratification to her to consider that this boating excursion would occasion some jealous twinges in the well-ordered mind of her eldest sister.

“Gertrude has such a way of appropriating people,” she said to herself, “and I really believe Mr. Forde considers her a paragon.”

The navigation grew easier by-and-by, as Tabor became less weedy. The banks, now high and broken, now sloping gently, were rich in varying beauty; but it was not of wild flowers or shivering rushes that Elizabeth thought in that slow summer voyage. The banks slid by like pictures gently shifting as she looked; now a herd of lazy kine, fetlock deep in the odorous after-math, and then a little copse of ancient hawthorn, and then a silvery creek darkly shadowed here and there by drooping willows that had grown aslant the stream. She was faintly conscious of these things, and felt a vague delight in them; but her thoughts were all of Malcolm Forde.

“Did you ever hear that story of Andrew Marvell’s father?” he said at last, breaking that lazy silence which had seemed only a natural element of the warm summer afternoon. There was a straight stretch of water now before him; so he laid down his pole, and seated himself in the bows with a pair of sculls. “He was a Hull man, you know, and a clergyman, and was going across the Humber to marry a couple in Lincolnshire. He was seized with a strange presentiment on stepping into the boat, and flung his walking-stick ashore, crying, ‘Ho, for heaven!’ The presage was not a false one, for old Marvell was drowned. The story came into my mind just now, when we left the bank, and I couldn’t help feeling that it would be a pleasant way of solving the problem of life to shoot mid-stream at random, crying out, ‘Ho, for heaven!’ like that old puritan parson.”

“It would be very nice if heaven could be reached so easily,” said Elizabeth, who had a feeling that for her the pilgrimage from this world to a better one must needs be difficult. She had never yet felt herself heavenly-minded; of the earth, carthy rather, with mundane longings for an opera-box and a barouche-and-pair.

“But I did not think you were tired of life, Mr. Forde,” she added, after a little pause.

“Not exactly tired, but at times perplexed. I sometimes doubt whether I am doing much good in Hawleigh—whether, indeed, I am doing anything that a man of less energy and ambition might not do just as well.”

“You feel like an eagle doing the work of a crow,” she answered, smiling. “I can fancy that Hawleigh must seem a narrow field for you. When you have persuaded people to decorate the churches, and attend the early services, and taught the choir to sing a little better, and bought surplices for the boys, it seems as if there was nothing left for you to do. I should think in

a populous seaport, now, where there are narrow streets and a great many wicked people, you would have a wider sphere."

"There might be more to do in a place of that kind," he said thoughtfully. "It wouldn't seem quite so much like a gardener's work in a trim smooth garden, always going over the same flower-beds, dragging up a little weed here and there, or cutting a withered branch. But that is not my dream. The field of action that I have thought about and longed for lies far away from England."

He was looking, not at Elizabeth, but above her head, along the shining river, as if he did indeed with his bodily eyes behold that wider land, that distant world of which he spoke.

Elizabeth grew pale with horror.

"You surely don't mean that you have ever thought of turning missionary?" she exclaimed.

"That has been my thought sometimes, when my work here has seemed wasted labour."

She was inexpressibly shocked. The very idea was disagreeable to her. There was even a kind of commonness, in her mind, in the image of a missionary. She imagined him a Low Church person, not very far removed from a dissenter, a man who let his hair grow long and was indifferent as to the fashion of his garments; such a man as she had heard hold forth, in short trousers and thick boots, at a meeting for the propagation of the Gospel. She did not imagine that the commonness was in her own mind, which could not perceive the width and grandeur in that sublime idea of gathering all the nations into one flock. It had never occurred to her that South Sea Islanders were of any importance in the scheme of creation, that university men in this privileged quarter of the globe owed any duty to dusky heathens dancing strange dances in distant groves of palm and breadfruit trees under a hot blue sky.

"O, I hope you will never think of such a desperate thing," she said with a little piteous look that touched him strangely. "It seems a kind of moral suicide."

"Say rather a second birth," he answered: "the beginning of a new and wider life—a life worth living."

"You must care very little for any one on this side of the world, when you can talk so calmly of going to the other."

"I have very few to care for," he replied gravely. "My family ties are represented by a bachelor uncle in Aberdeenshire—a grim old man, who farms a wild sheep-walk of five thousand acres or so, and lives in a lonely homestead, where he hears few sounds except the lowing of his kine and the roar of the German Ocean. I think I am just the right kind of man for a missionary; and if you knew the story of my life, and the circumstance that led to my change of profession, I fancy you would agree with me."

"But I know nothing of your life," Elizabeth cried impatiently. She was unreasonably angry with him for this missionary project, almost as angry as if it had been a deliberate wrong done to herself. "You came to us a stranger, and you have remained a stranger to us, though you have been at Hawleigh more than a year. You are so reserved—not like papa's other curates, who were only too glad to pour out their inmost feelings, as it were. I'm sure I knew every detail of Mr. Dysart's family—his papa's opinions, his mamma's little peculiarities, the colour of all his sisters' hair, even the history of the gentlemen to whom the sisters were engaged. And it was almost the same with Mr. Horton. Mr. Adderley was fonder of prosing about himself than his surroundings, and I don't think the poor young man ever had an idea in his rather narrow brain that he did not impart to us."

"You see I am not of so communicative a disposition," said Mr. Forde, smiling; "and when there has been one great sorrow in a life, as there has in mine, it is apt to assume an unnatural proportion to the rest, and obscure all minor details. I had a great loss five years before I came to Hawleigh. I have often been inclined to tell you all about it, especially of late, since I have seen your character in its most amiable light. But these things are painful to speak of, and my loss was a very bitter one."

"You are speaking of the death of your mother?" inquired Elizabeth, trembling a little, with a strange sharp dread.

"No; my mother died fifteen years ago. That loss was bitter, but it was one for which I had been long prepared. The latter loss was utterly unexpected, and shattered the very fabric of my life."

"I should like to hear about it," said Elizabeth, her face bent over the water, one idle hand drawn loosely through the tide.

"I am assured that you are kind and sympathetic," he said, "or I should never have touched upon this subject. I never had a sister, and perhaps on that account have not acquired the habit of confession. But—but—" very slowly, and with a curious hesitation, "I think I should like to talk to you—about her. About Alice Fraser, the woman who was to have been my wife."

The face bent over the river flushed crimson, the little white hand shivered in the tide; but Elizabeth spoke no word.

"When I went to India with my regiment—it was just after the Mutiny—I left my promised wife behind me. We were old friends, had been playfellows even, though the little Scottish lassie was seven years younger than I. She was the daughter of a Scotch parson, a man of noble mind and widest reading, and the best friend and counsellor I ever had. I will not try to tell you what she was like. To me she seemed perfection, pretty enough to be charming, full of brightness and vivacity, yet with a depth

and earnestness in her nature, that made me—her senior by seven years—feel that here was a staff to lean upon through all the journey of life. I cannot tell you how I revered this girl of nineteen. You will perhaps think that she was self-opinionated, or what people call strong-minded; but there was never a more simple unassuming nature. She had been educated by her father, and on a wider plan than the common scheme of a woman's teaching. Of late years she had shared his studies, and had been his chosen companion in every hour of leisure. Of her goodness to the people round about her I cannot trust myself to speak. Her memory is cherished in Lanorgie as the memory of a saint. I doubt if, among all who knew her well in that simple flock, there is one who could speak of her even now without tears."

He paused for some few minutes, perhaps lost in thought, recalling that remote Scottish village, and the sweet girlish face that had been the delight of his life six years ago. The oars dipped gently in the river, the boat glided on with imperceptible motion, and Elizabeth sat silent with her face still bent over the water, dragging the long green river-weeds through her cold white fingers.

"She had the very slightest Scottish accent—an accent that gave a plaintive tone to her voice, like music in a minor key. She was slender and fragile, just about the middle height, very fair but very pale, with soft brown hair—the sort of woman a painter would choose for Imogen or Ophelia; not an objective nature, strongly marked with its own individuality; subjective rather, yet strong enough to resist all evil. A bad husband might have broken her heart, but he would never have sullied her mind."

He stopped again, laid down his sculls, and drew the boat under the reedy bank. Elizabeth was obliged to look up now. The little gray straw hat with its convenient shadow hid the change in her face, in some measure; but not entirely, for Mr. Forde observed that she was very pale.

"I fear you are tired," he said, "or that my dreary talk has wearied you."

"No, no; go on. She must have been very good."

"She had less of humanity's alloy than any creature I ever knew," he answered. "I used to think that it would be a privilege for any man—the best even—to spend his life in her company. There was one subject that gave her great pain, and that was the fact of my profession. To her gentle spirit there was something horrible in a soldier's career. She could not see the nobler side of my calling. And I loved her too well to hold by anything that gave her pain. I promised her that I would sell out immediately on my return from foreign service, and kept my word."

"It was not of your own accord, then, that you left the army?" asked Elizabeth absently, as if only half her brain were following his words.

"No, it was entirely to please Alice. I sacrificed my own inclinations in the matter. That conviction which has become the very keystone of my life since then is a faith that grew out of my great sorrow. I cannot tell you the rest of the story too briefly. I went back to Lanorgie a free man. I was to be a farmer—a country gentleman on a small scale—anything Alice pleased, in the district where I was born. My sweet girl was to live for ever among the people she loved. Our life was to be Arcadian—a pastoral poem. We were both very happy. I can safely declare that there was not left in my mind one spark of mankind's common desire of success or distinction. The long calm years stretched themselves out before me in sweet eventless happiness."

"You must have loved her very much?"

"If you could measure my love by the change it made in me, you would have good reason to say so. I had been as eager as other young men for name, position, wealth, pleasure—perhaps even more eager. But Alice's love filled my mind with a great content. She made herself the sun of my life. I desired nothing beyond the peaceful circle of the home that she and I were to share together. Well, Miss Luttrell,"—this with a sudden abruptness, as if the words were wrenched from him,—“it was a common trouble enough when it came. Our wedding-day was fixed; her old father, every one was happy. The last touch had been put to our new home; a house I had built for my darling upon a hill-side facing the sea, on my own land. Everything was arranged—our honeymoon trip southwards to the Cumberland lakes had been planned between us on the map one sweet summer evening. We parted at her father's door; she a little graver than usual—but that seemed natural on the threshold of so great a change. When I went to the manse next morning, they told me that she was not quite well—that her father's old friend, the village doctor, recommended her to keep her room for a day or two, and to see no one. She had had a little too much excitement and fatigue lately. I reproached myself bitterly for our long walks on the hills and by the rugged sea-shore we both loved so well. All she wanted was perfect rest.

"They kept me off like this for nearly a week; now confessing reluctantly that she was not quite so well; now cheering me with the assurance that she was better. Then one morning I heard they had sent to Glasgow for a physician. After that, I insisted upon seeing her.

"She did not know me. I stood beside her bed, and the sweet blue eyes looked up at me, but she was unconscious. The

physician acknowledged that it was a case of typhoid fever. There was very little ground for hope. Yet we did hope—blindly—to the last. I telegraphed for other doctors. But we could not save her. She died in my arms at daybreak on the day that was to have seen us married.

“I will not speak of the dead blank that followed her death—of the miserable time in which I could think of nothing but the one fact of my loss. The time came at last when I could think of her more calmly, and then I set myself to consider what I could do, now she was gone, to prove that I had loved her—what tribute I could render to my dead. It was then I thought of entering the Church—of devoting myself, so far as in me lay, to the good of others—of leading such a life as she would have blessed. That is the origin of all I have done, of all I hope to do. That is the end of my story, Miss Luttrell. I trust I have not tired you very much. I thought we should be better friends, if you knew more about my past.”

“I am very glad,” she answered gently. “I have sometimes fancied there must be something in your life, some sorrowful memory: not that there has ever seemed anything gloomy in your character; but you are so much more in earnest, altogether so unlike papa’s other curates.”

A faint blush lit up the pale face as she said this, remembering that he differed most widely from these gentlemen in his total inability to appreciate herself.

Yes, she had fancied there was some bitter memory in his past, but not this. His confidence had strangely shocked her. It was inexpressibly painful to her to discover that his love—and so profound a love—had all been lavished upon another woman years ago; that were she, Elizabeth Luttrell, twice as lovely, twice as fascinating as she was, she could never be anything to him. He had chosen his type of womanly perfection; he had given away all the feeling, all the passion that it was in him to give, long before he had seen her face.

“Did he suppose that—that I was beginning to think too much of him,” she said to herself, blushing indignantly, “and tell me this story by way of a warning? O, no, no! his manner was too straightforward for that. He thinks that I am good, thinks that I am able to sympathise with him, to pity him, to be sorry for that dead girl. And I am not. I think I am jealous of her in her grave.”

The boat glides softly on. They come to a curve in the river, and to Mr. Melvin’s party returning noisily.

“You are not going to take Miss Elizabeth any farther, are you?” cries Frederick. “We are going back to tea. How slow you’ve been! We went as far as the Bells, and had some shandy-gaff.”

Mr. Forde turned his clumsy bark, and all the voyage back was noisy with the talk of the Melvin party and the Oxonians' punt-load of vivacious humanity. They were all in holiday spirits, laughing on the faintest provocation, at the smallest imaginable jokes. Elizabeth thought it the most dismal business. All the sunshine was taken out of her afternoon; Tabor seemed a sullen stream flowing between flat weedy banks. But she could not afford to let other people perceive her depression—Mr. Forde above all. She was obliged to affect amusement at those infinitesimal jokes, those stale witticisms, while she was thinking all the time of that thrice-blessed woman whom Malcolm Forde had loved, and who had timely died while his passion was yet in its first bloom and freshness.

"I daresay if she had gone on living he would have been tired of her by this time," she said to herself in a cynical mood, "She would have been his wife of ever so many years' standing, with a herd of small children, perhaps, on her mind, and just as commonplace as all the wives one knows—women whose intellects hardly soar above nursemaids and pinafores. How much better to be a sacred memory of his life than a prosaic fact in his everyday existence!"

After this, Elizabeth felt as if she could have no more pleasure in Malcolm Forde's society. Her selfish soul revolted against the idea that the memory of his dead was more to him than any favour her friendship could bestow, that she was divided from him by the width of a grave.

"I wish his Alice had lived, and he stayed among his native hills with the rest of the Scotch barbarians," she said to herself. "I don't think I've been quite happy since I've known him. He makes one feel such a contemptible creature, with his grand ideas of what a woman ought to be; and then, after one has tried one's hardest to be good against one's very nature, he coolly informs one that there never was but one perfect woman in the world, and that she lies among the Scottish hills with his heart buried in her grave."

CHAPTER V.

- Well, you may, you must, set down to me
Love that was life, life that was love;
- A tenure of breath at your lips' decree,
A passion to stand as your thoughts approve,
• A rapture to fall where your foot might be."

THE gipsy-tea went off brilliantly. The fuel-collecting and fire-making and kettle-boiling afforded ample sport for those wilder

and more youthful spirits whose capacity for flirtation was not yet exhausted. Fred Melvin belonged to that harmless class of young men who, although in the dull round of daily life but moderately gifted, shine forth with unexpected lustre on such an occasion as this, and prove themselves what their friends call "an acquisition." He fanned life and light into a hopelessly obstinate fire, with his straw hat for an extemporaneous bellows; he showed a profound knowledge of engineering in his method of placing the kettle on the burning logs, so as not immediately to extinguish the flames he had just coaxed into being.

"I don't think there was anything so very wonderful in Watt inventing the steam-engine," said Miss Melvin, standing by and admiring her brother's dexterity; "I believe Fred would have been quite as likely to hit upon it, if it hadn't been done before his time."

They drank tea in little scattered groups: the elders fore-gathering in small knots to talk scandal or parish business, or to indulge in mild jeremiads upon the frivolity and general empty-headedness of the rising generation, their own sons and daughters and nephews and nieces not excepted; the juniors to disport themselves after their kind with inexhaustible nothings, vapid utterances which filled the soul of Elizabeth with contempt.

She carried her teacup away to a lonely little bit of bank where the rushes on the shelving shore grew high enough to screen her from the rest of the company, and sat here alone, absorbed in languid contemplation of the quiet water and all the glories of the sunset reflected on that smooth tide.

Fred Melvin, seeing the white dress vanishing beyond the trees, would fain have gone in pursuit, but the Luttrell sisters prevented him.

"Elizabeth has one of her headaches, I daresay," said Diana. "It would be no use going after her."

"One of her tempers, you mean, Di," exclaimed Blanche with sisterly candour. "That's always the way with Lizzie if everything doesn't happen exactly as she wants it to happen. I think she would like a world made to order, on purpose for her."

"I hope we haven't done anything to offend her," cried the anxious Frederick, whose adoration of "the beauty," as chief goddess of his soul, had never suffered diminution, not even when he amused himself by offering his homage at lesser shrines. "Perhaps she didn't like our going off in the boat without her; but it really couldn't have held so much as a lap-dog beyond our load."

"As if anything *you* could do would offend her!" exclaimed the impetuous Blanche, always ready to rebuke Mr. Melvin's vain passion. "Do you think she wanted to come in our boat? She

would have given her ears for that *tête-à-tête* row with Mr. Forde, only I suppose it didn't answer."

"Blanche, how can you be so absurd!" cried Gertrude.

"If you don't learn to behave yourself with common decency, we really must leave you at home in the nursery another time," said Diana.

Mr. Forde was happily beyond the hearing of this little explosion. He was in infinite request among the matrons of the party, who all regarded him more or less as a modern St. Francis de Sales, and who gave him not a little trouble by their insistence upon communicating small facts relating to their spiritual progress; little sentimental gushes of feeling which he did his best to check, his ideas of his duty being of the broadest and grandest character. He would rather have had the conversion of all the hardened or remorseful felons at Portland or Dartmoor on his hands than those gushing matrons and sentimental spinsters, who could not travel the smallest stage of their journey towards the heavenly Jerusalem without being propped and sustained by him.

Nor was it pleasant to listen to little laments about the Vicar. "A kind, generous-minded man, Mr. Forde, and very good to the poor, I believe, in his own careless way,—but so unspiritual! We hardly knew what light was till you came among us." And so on, and so on. He was glad to slip away from the elder tea-drinkers, and stroll in and out among the giant beech boles, with the gay sound of youthful laughter and happy idle talk filling the atmosphere around him.

He lingered to say a few words to Gertrude Luttrell and her party, and then looked round the circle curiously, as if missing some one.

"I don't see your sister," he said at last, "Miss Elizabeth."

Miss Luttrell coloured furiously.

"Lizzie has strayed off somewhere," she said. "She appears to prefer the company of her own thoughts to *our* society. Perhaps had she known you would express so much anxiety about her she would have stayed."

"I am not particularly anxious," replied Mr. Forde, with his thoughtful smile, a smile which lent sudden life and brightness to the dark grave face. "Only I have it on my conscience that I kept your sister on the river a long while under a blazing sun, and I feared she might be too tired to enjoy herself with the rest of you. Can I take her a cup of tea?"

"I don't think I would if I were you," cried Fred Melvin, who was in a picturesque attitude, half kneeling, half reclining at the feet of Blanche Luttrell, while his cousin, Jane Harrison, for whom there was some dim notion of his ripening into a husband by-and-by, sat looking on with an aggrieved air. "I took her

a second cup just now," grumbled Fred, "and very nearly got my nose snapped off for my pains."

Not an encouraging statement; but Mr. Forde was not afraid of any attacks upon his nose: was not that feature in a manner sanctified by his profession, and the very high rate at which the curate race is held two hundred and fifty miles from London? He was in nowise deterred by Mr. Melvin's complaint, but went off at once in quest of Elizabeth.

"I saddened her with that melancholy story," he thought. "Perhaps I ought not to have told her. Yet I think she is the kind of woman a man might dare to choose out of all other women for his friend. I think she is of a different stuff from the rest of Hawleigh womankind. She has shown herself superior to them all in her power to win the love of the poor. And we could never be friends until she knew my story, and knew that the word 'love' has been blotted from the book of my life."

It was a new fancy of Mr. Forde's this desire that there should really be friendship—something more than the every-day superficial acquaintance engendered by church decoration and croquet—between himself and Elizabeth Luttrell. It was not to be in the slightest degree sentimental—the popular platonic idea. The Madame-Récamier-and-Chateaubriand kind of thing had never entered into his thoughts, nor did he mean that they should see any more of each other than they had done heretofore; only that there should be confidence and trust between them instead of strangeness.

He found her presently on her lonely bank by the Tabor, seated in a thoughtful attitude, and casting little turfs of moss and lady's-slipper idly upon the tide. She had arrayed herself with a studied simplicity for this rustic gathering; perhaps fully conscious that she was one of the few women who can afford to dispense with frillings and puffings and ruchings—the whole framework of beauty, as it were. She wore a plain white muslin gown, high to the throat, round which she had tied a dark-blue ribbon—the true Oxford blue, almost black against the ivory-white of her neck. The long dark ribbon made a rippling line to the perfect waist; perfect in its exquisite proportion to the somewhat full and stately figure—the waist of a Juno rather than a sylph. Her head was uncovered, and the low sunlight lit up all the bronze tints in her dark brown hair, shone, too, in the luminous grey eyes, fixed dreamily upon the gleaming water. Mr. Forde stood for a few moments a little way off, admiring her—simply as he would have admired a picture, of course.

His footsteps made a faint rustling among the rushes as he came nearer to her. She looked round suddenly, and all her face flushed crimson at sight of him.

That blush would have elevated Fred Melvin to the seventh heaven; but Malcolm Forde was no coxcomb, and did not attribute the heightened tint to any magical power of his own. She was nervous, perhaps, and he had startled her by his sudden approach; or she might be indeed, as her friends had suggested, a little out of temper, and annoyed at being tracked to her lair.

"Don't be angry with me for disturbing your solitary musings, Miss Elizabeth," he said, very much detesting the ceremonial Miss; "but I really don't think you're enjoying your father's picnic quite so much as you ought, for your own satisfaction and that of your friends."

"I hate picnics," she answered peevishly; "and if papa gives one next year, I'll have nothing to do with it. I'm sure I wish I'd stayed in Hawleigh and gone to see my poor people. I should have been much happier sitting by Mrs. Jones's wash-tub, or reading to Mrs. Brown while she mended her husband's stockings."

"If you speak like that, I shall think I spoiled your pleasure by that egotistical talk in the boat."

She only shook her head and looked away from him at a distant curve of the river. There was an awkward sensation of semi-strangulation in her throat. For her very life she could not have answered him. Yes, it was a bitter disappointment to discover that he had flung away his heart before he came to Hawleigh; that he was a kind of widower, and pledged never to marry again.

"I am so sorry that I told you that story. Of course it was no fitting time. I was a brute not to have thought of that; but we so rarely have time for a confidential talk, and I have been so much interested in your work lately, so much pleased by your hearty manner of taking up a duty which I know did at first seem uncongenial to you, and I was anxious that we should be friends. Pray do not let the gloom of my past life weigh upon your spirits even for an hour. It was a most ill-advised confession. Try to forget that it was ever made."

Silence still, and the head turned obstinately towards the river. Was it temper? or compassion for another's woes more profound than he had dreamed of?

"Say, at least, that you forgive me for having depressed you."

Still no answer in words, but a hand stretched out towards his, a hand chill as death.

"Let me take you back to your friends," he said, alarmed by the cold touch of that little hand, which he clasped for a moment with a friendly pressure and then let fall. "I shall not forgive myself till I see you happy with the others."

She rose slowly and took the arm which he offered her. That choking sensation had been conquered by this time, and she was able to answer him quite calmly:

"Pray don't distress yourself about me," she said; "I am very glad that you told me your story, that you think me worthy of your confidence."

He took her back to the circle under the Beeches. Cups and saucers were being gathered up, the bustle of preparation for departure had begun. Wagonette, omnibus, and dogcart stood ready for the homeward journey, and the usual discussions and disputes as to the mode and manner of return were going on: elderly spinsters languishing to travel on the roof of the omnibus, and protesting their affection for the perfume of cigars; fastish young ladies pleading for the same privilege; and all the male kind thinly disguising the leaven of selfishness that was in them, and the desire to appropriate the roof to their own accommodation, by an affected solicitude as to the hazard of cold-catching.

"We ought to have had a dance," grumbled *Blanche*; "it would have been the easiest thing in the world to bring a couple of men with a harp and a fiddle, but I suppose it would have been considered unclerical. It would have been so nice. We should have fancied ourselves fairies tripping lightly under the greenwood tree. I declare it seems quite a shame to go home so early—just when the air is pleasantest, and all the stars are beginning to peep out of their nests in the sky—as if we were a children's tea-party."

The fiat, however, had gone forth, the vehicles were ready, the foggy-ish element in the party eager to depart before dews began to fall, and toads, bats, owls, spiders, and other rustic horrors to pervade the scene; the juvenile population loth to go, yet eager for the excitement of the return journey, with all its opportunities for unlimited flirtation.

Fred Melvin was the proud proprietor of the dogcart, a conveyance usually appropriated to the uses of his father—the family carriage, in short—which, if it had only possessed one of those removable American-oven tops popular in the rural districts would have even done duty for a brougham. Urged thereto by his sister, and with considerable reluctance, the young solicitor entreated Mr. Forde, who had come on the box of the omnibus, to accept a seat in his chariot—a variety in the mode of return being esteemed a privilege by the picnickers.

"Mr. Forde won't want to go back on the omnibus, I dare say, Fred," argued *Laura Melvin*. "You might as well offer him a seat in the dogcart."

To which suggestion *Frederick* growled that he wanted no

parsons, and that he was going to ask one of the Luttrell girls.

"You can ask one of the Miss Luttrells, too, Fred. There'll only be you and me and Mr. Forde, Jenny's going home inside the omnibus. She has a touch of her neuralgia; and I don't wonder, poor girl, you've been flirting so shamefully with Blanche Luttrell. I wonder how a girl hardly out of pinafores can go on so."

So Fred went away to offer the vacant seats; first to Mr. Forde, with reluctant politeness.

"You don't like too much smoke, I daresay, and those fellows on the 'bus will be smoking like so many factory chimneys every inch of the way. You'd better have your quiet cigar in my trap."

"You're very good. I don't like bad tobacco, certainly; and the odours I enjoyed coming were not by any means the perfumes of Arabia. But are you sure I shall not be in the way?"

"O, you won't be in the way. I am going to ask Lizzie Luttrell, and that'll make up the four."

Mr. Forde winced at this familiar mention of the damsel in whom he had permitted himself to become interested; but that kind of familiarity is a natural attribute of brothers in their intercourse with their sisters' friends. "A different race, these provincial brothers, from the rest of mankind," Mr. Forde thought.

"I'm going to ask her," repeated Frederick, as he tightened the chestnut mare's kicking-strap, "but I don't suppose she'll come, unless her temper's undergone some improvement since I took her that cup of tea."

Elizabeth Luttrell drew nigh at this moment, in grave converse with a little silver-headed gentleman, the ancient banker of Hawleigh.

To Mr. Melvin's surprise, she accepted his offer with extreme graciousness.

"I like a dogcart above all things," she said, "especially if I may sit behind. I do so like the excitement of the sensation that one will be jerked off if the horse shies."

But against this Fred protested vehemently.

"You must sit next the driver," he said; "Laura can sit behind with Mr. Forde. Not that Bess ever shies, but you must have the post of honour."

"Then I'll go home in the omnibus," said Lizzie; "I know riding behind always makes Laura nervous."

Miss Melvin, pressed hard upon this point, acknowledged that the jerky sensation which was pleasant to Elizabeth's bolder spirit was eminently appalling to herself. So Elizabeth had

her own way, and occupied the back seat of the dogcart, with Mr. Forde by her side.

The journey back to Hawleigh was a ten-mile drive through west-country lanes, bordered by steep banks and tall tangled hedges that shut out the landscape, except for those privileged travellers on the roof of the omnibus. Only now and then did the dogcart emerge from the shadow of hawthorn and woodbine, wild rose and wild apple, into the moonlit open country; but the odour of those leafy lanes was sweet, and beyond them, far away in the soft silver light, spread fair hill-sides and wooded slopes, and brief flashes of the winding river.

It only lasted an hour and a quarter, that homeward journey, the dogcart keeping well ahead of the heavier vehicles, and Bess the mare performing the distance in so superior a manner as almost to justify that pride in her which was one of the chief articles of faith in the household code of the Melvins. Elizabeth would have thought better of the animal had she loitered a little on the way. Not often could she enjoy a moonlight *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Forde—for it mattered little that Fred interjected his trivial little remarks every now and then across Miss Luttrell's shoulder; not often had he unbent to her as he unbent to-night, talking to her as if she were verily in some measure a part of his inner life, and not a mere accident in the outer world around him. That confession of his past sorrows seemed really to have brought them a little closer together, and Elizabeth began to think there might indeed be such a thing as friendship between them; friendship that would brighten the dull round of district-visiting, sweeten all her life, and yet leave her free to dream her favourite day-dream of a wealthy marriage in the days to come; a splendid position won suddenly by her beauty; a swift and easy translation to a land flowing with silks and laces and all kinds of Parisian millinery; a little heaven here below in the way of opera-boxes and races and flower-shows and morning concerts; while Mr. Forde remained at liberty to fulfil that scheme of a monkish life which he had in his own quiet manner avowed to his more familiar friends of the district-visiting class.

“And perhaps some day, after I am married, he will really go to the South-Sea Islands, or the centre of Africa, as a missionary,” she thought, with a little regretful sigh; “and years afterwards, when I am middle-aged and his hair is growing gray, he will come back to England as Bishop of Tongataboo, or some fearful place, and I shall hear him preach a charity sermon at a fashionable London church.”

It seemed hardly worth her while to be sorry about so remote a contingency; but she could not help feeling a pang at the thought that this part of her vision was the most likely to be

realised: that whether the hypothetical baronet, with thirty thousand a year, did or did not appear upon the narrow scene of her life, Malcolm Forde would spread his pinions and soar away to a wider field than this small provincial town.

The dogcart arrived at the gate of Hawleigh Vicarage quite half an hour in advance of the other vehicles. It was past ten o'clock, and rare lights burned dimly in the upper casements of the houses that were scattered here and there along the high-road on this side of the town, the more exclusive and suburban quarter, adorned by the trim gothic lodges of the villas that half aspired to be country seats. The vicarage servants—Ann the sometime nurse and general factotum, Susan the cook, Rebecca the housemaid, and Jakes, the man-of-all-work—were clustered at the gate, waiting to witness the return of the picnickers, as more sophisticated domestics might stand at gaze to see all the drags and wagonettes and hansom cabs of the famous Derby pilgrimage file slowly past Clapham-common.

"You'll come in, won't you, Laura?" said Elizabeth, who did not wish her evening to close abruptly with brief farewells at the gate. "Jakes can take care of your horse, Mr. Melvin. You'll wait for papa, won't you Mr. Forde, and to say good-night to every one?"

"If you are sure that you are not tired, and would be glad to get rid of us and go in and rest," said Mr. Forde doubtfully.

"I am not in the least tired. I feel more in the humour to begin a picnic than I did at one o'clock to-day. Why, in London fashionable people are only just beginning to go out to parties! We seem to cut off the best end of our lives in the country with our stupid humdrum habits. Don't you think the night is best, Mr. Forde?"

"For study, I admit."

"O, for pleasure, for everything!" cried Elizabeth impatiently. "I feel another creature at night, out of doors, in summer moonlight like this. There is a kind of intoxication: one's soul seems to soar away into clearer air, into dreamland. What would dancing be like at eleven o'clock in the morning, or at three on a sultry afternoon? Why, it would seem perfect lunacy! But at night, with open windows, and the moonlight outside, and the scent of the flowers blowing in from the garden, it is simply rapture, because we are not quite the same people, you see, towards midnight. For my own part, on a summer evening I always feel as if I had wings." She said this in a rapid excited tone, as if this particular moonlight had indeed produced an abnormal effect upon her spirits.

They had all strolled into the garden, Frederick having reluctantly committed the mare to the man-of-all-work. Mr. Forde was walking between the two young ladies, Miss Melvin feeling

that it was mere foolishness to hope for any attention from a curate while Elizabeth ran on in that wild and almost disreputable way of hers, not in the least like a well-brought-up young lady. But then it was a well-known fact that the Luttrell girls had received only a desultory training, not the regular old-established boarding-school grinding: but sometimes a morning governess, and sometimes an interregnum of intermittent instruction from their father; sometimes masters for music and drawing, sometimes nothing at all. They were all clever girls, of course, said the genteel matrons of Hawleigh, or they could hardly have grown up as well as they had; but they had not enjoyed the advantages of the orthodox discipline for the youthful mind, and the consequences of this irregular education cropped up occasionally. The girls had read almost what they liked, and had stronger opinions than were becoming in a vicar's daughters.

To Laura Melvin's gratified surprise, Mr. Forde did not take any notice of Elizabeth's tirade about moonlight, but turned to her, Laura, and began to question her politely respecting her enjoyment of the day, while Fred, eager to snatch his opportunity, flew to Elizabeth.

"Didn't Bess do the ten miles well?" he asked by way of a lively beginning, quite prepared to have his advances ill received.

But Elizabeth was still under the intoxication of the moonlight. She was a person of singularly variable spirits, and the sullen gloom that had come upon her after that interview in the boat had now changed to a reckless vivacity.

"The drive was delightful," she said. "I should like to scamper all over Devonshire and Cornwall in such a dogcart, with just such a horse, stopping at all manner of wild places, and being benighted, and camping on the moors. What a mistake it is to live all one's life shut up between four walls, in the same place, with no more variety from year's end to year's end than a fortnight in seaside lodgings! O, how I wish Providence had made me a gipsy, or a Bedouin Arab!

"Awfully jolly, I should think, the Bedouins," replied Fred doubtfully. "They tumble, don't they? I remember seeing some Bedouin tumblers at Vauxhall when I was a youngster, and was up in London with the paternal party. But those were all men and boys. I don't think the women tumbled; and *their* lives must have been uncommonly dull, shut up somewhere in London lodgings, while their husbands and brothers were performing, not being able to speak English, you know, poor creatures, or anything."

"O you stupid Fred!" cried Elizabeth, who sometimes deigned to address the young man in this familiar way. "As if I meant performing Arabs! I should like to be the daughter of some

Arab chief in the great desert, with my own darling horse to carry me on the wings of the wind, and only a tent to live in, and locusts and wild honey for my dinner, like John the Baptist. I should like to be one of those nice brown-faced girls who go about the country with a van-load of mats and brooms. There seems something respectable in brooms. They would hardly send me to prison as a rogue and vagabond; and O, how nice it must be never to stay very long in the same place!"

"And to have no friends and no home, and no books or piano, and to be of no particular use in the world; only always toiling more or less hopelessly for one's daily bread: and to die some day by the roadside, of hard work and exposure to all kinds of weather," continued Mr. Forde, who had soon exhausted his little stock of civilities to Miss Melvin, and turned to listen to Elizabeth's random talk. "I'm afraid you must be very tired of us all, Miss Luttrell, when your soul yearns for the broom-girl life."

"Not so tired as you confess yourself to be of *us* when you contemplate converting the heathen," answered the girl, turning her back upon the hapless Frederick.

"It is not because I am tired of you that I think sometimes of a broader field and harder work," he answered gravely, "but for quite a different reason—because I sometimes find my life here too easy, too pleasant; an enervating life, in short. It is not always wise for a man to trust himself to be happy."

"I thought you had done with happiness, after—what you told me this afternoon," said Elizabeth, almost bitterly.

Her speech shocked him a little. He answered it in his coldest tones.

"With one kind of happiness, yes, and that perhaps the only perfect happiness in this world—companionship with a perfect woman."

"A very good way of reminding me that I'm an imperfect one," thought Elizabeth, not unconscious of deserving the implied rebuke.

They walked slowly round the garden in the moonlight, side by side, but somewhat silent after this, leaving Frederick to straggle in their rear with his sister, an ignominious mode of treatment which he inwardly resented. Nor was he sorry when the omnibus and wagonette drove up to the gate to release him from this humiliating position. He felt himself rehabilitated in his own self-esteem when Blanche, who really came next to Elizabeth in the scale of prettiness, skipped gaily up to him, telling him that she had had the dullest imaginable drive inside the omnibus, and that she had been dreadfully jealous of Lizzie, who of course had been having capital fun in the dogcart.

"I don't know whether Forde is particularly good fun," Mr

Melvin replied with a sulky air. "Your sister had *him* all to herself. There was no getting in a word edgewise. I think when a man as good as gives out from the pulpit that he never means to marry, he ought to give up flirting into the bargain."

"O, Fred, how shameful of you to say such a thing! As if Mr. Forde ever flirted!"

"I should like to know what he's doing now," grumbled Fred. "If that isn't the real thing, it's an uncommonly good imitation."

Elizabeth had taken up her favourite position by the sundial, and Malcolm Forde was standing by her, talking earnestly, or at least with an appearance of earnestness; and it is one of the misfortunes of youth that two persons of opposite sex cannot converse for ten minutes with any show of interest without raising suspicions of flirtation in the minds of the beholders.

"Doesn't it seem absurd," exclaimed the aggrieved Frederick, "after all Elizabeth has said about never marrying a clergyman?"

"She is not obliged to marry Mr. Forde because she talks to him for five minutes, is she, you stupid creature?" cried Blanche, disapproving this appearance of concern in her admirer—eligible young men were so rare at Hawleigh.

And now, after some consumption of claret-cup or sherry-and-soda among the elders in the low candle-lit drawing-room, and a straggling flirtation among the juniors here and there about the garden, there came a general good-night, and Mr. Luttrell's guests dispersed, in carriages or on foot, to that gentleman's supreme contentment. This kind of thing was one of the penalties that went along with a flock of daughters.

"Thank heaven, that's over," he said with a faint groan, and in a tone of voice strangely different from the friendly warmth of his last farewell. "And now mind, I am not to be bothered about any more party-giving on this side of Christmas."

"I am sure I shouldn't care if there were never to be another party on the face of the earth," said Elizabeth drearily. Whereby it might be supposed that, so far as the prettiest Miss Luttrell was concerned, the day's festivities had been a failure.

Blanche questioned her by-and-by up in their tower chamber—the ancient octagon room, with its deep-set casements and litter of girlish trifles, its bird-cages and bookshelves, and glove-boxes and scent-bottles—questioned her closely, but at the outset could extort very little from those firm proud lips.

"You know you were glad to have that ride home with him," said the girl persistently. "You know you quarrelled with him in the boat, and were miserable afterwards. You know you are fond of him, Lizzie. What's the good of trying to hide it from me?"

"Fond of him!" cried Elizabeth passionately. "Fond of a man who scarcely ever says a civil word to me! Fond of a man who, if he ever were to care for me—and he never will—would want to make me a district-visitor or a female missionary! You ought to know me better, Blanche."

"I know you are fond of him," the girl repeated resolutely. "Why, you've changed your very nature for his sake! As if we didn't all of us know the influence that has made you take up Gertrude's work!"

Elizabeth burst out laughing.

"Perhaps I wanted to take the shine out of Gertrude's supernal virtues," she said. "Perhaps I wanted to show him that I was just as well able to do that kind of a thing as his Hawleigh saints, who call it their vocation—that I was able to make the poor people love me, which very few of his saints can manage."

"Upon my word, Lizzie, I'm afraid you're very wicked," exclaimed Blanche, staring at her sister with an awed look.

Elizabeth was sitting on the edge of the low French bed, her brown hair falling round her like a sombre drapery, her eyes fixed with a dreamy look, a half-mischievous, half-triumphant smile upon her lips.

"I'm afraid you're right," she said with a sudden burst of candour. "I feel intensely wicked at this moment. Can you guess what I should like to do, Blanche?"

"Not I. You are the most unfathomable girl in creation."

"I should like to bring that man to my feet, to make him as deeply in love with me as—as ever any miserable slavish woman was with a man who did not love her, and then spurn him; fool him to the top of his bent, Blanche; and when I had become the very apple of his eye—perhaps while he was deliberating in his slow dull soul as to whether he should make an election between me and the conversion of the South-Sea Islanders—astonish him some fine morning by announcing my engagement with somebody a little better worth marrying. He would have his South-Sea Islanders left to console him."

She flung the cloud of hair back from her face impatiently, with a bitter little laugh and a downward glance of the dark eyes, as if she did indeed see Malcolm Forde at her feet, and were scorning him.

Blanche gazed at her with unmitigated horror.

"Goodness gracious, Lizzie! What can put such dreadful ideas into your head? ... What has Malcolm Forde done to make you so savage?"

"What has he done? O, nothing, I suppose," half hysterically. "But I should like to punish him for all he has made me suffer to-day."

CHAPTER VI.

When God smote His hands together, and struck out thy soul as a spark
Into the organized glory of things, from deeps of the dark,—

Say, didst thou shine, didst thou burn, didst thou honour the power in
the form,

As the star does at night, or the fire-fly, or even the little ground-worm!

“I have sinned,” she said,

“For my seed-light shed

Has smouldered away from His first decrees.

The cypress praiseth the fire-fly, the ground-leaf praiseth the worm;

I am viler than these.”

WHAT had Malcolm Forde done? The question was one which that gentleman demanded of himself not unfrequently during the next few weeks. Was it wise or foolish to have bared this old wound before the pitying, or unpitying, eyes of Elizabeth Luttrell; to have made this appeal for womanly sympathy, he who was by nature so reticent, who had kept his griefs so sternly locked within his own breast until now? Was it wise or foolish? Was he right in deeming her nobler than the common herd of women, a soul with whom it might be sweet to hold friendship's calm communion, a woman whom he dared cultivate as his friend? He was not even yet fully resolved upon this point; but of possible peril to himself in any such association he had never dreamed. Long ago he had told himself that his heart was buried in Alice Fraser's grave, laid at rest for ever in the hill-side burial ground beneath the mountains that shelter Lanorgie; long ago he had solemnly devoted all the power of his intellect, all the vigour of his manhood, to the pursuit of a grander aim than that mere earthly happiness for which the majority of mankind searches. From that burial of all his human hopes there could be no such thing as resurrection. To be false to the memory of his lost bride, to forswear the oath he made to himself when he took his priestly vows, with a wider or a sterner view of the priestly office than is common to English churchmen—to do this would be to stamp himself for ever in his own esteem the weakest and meanest of mankind. Such a thing was simply impossible. He had therefore no snare to dread in friendly companionship with a bright generous-hearted young creature who was infinitely superior to her surroundings, a faulty soul vaguely struggling towards a purer atmosphere, a woman whom he might help to be good.

He felt that here was a noble nature in sore peril of shipwreck, a creature with the grandest capabilities, who might for

lack of culture achieve nothing but evil; a soul too easily led astray, a heart too impulsive to resist temptation.

"If she were my sister I would make her one of the noblest women of her age," he said to himself, with a firm faith in his own influence upon this feebler feminine spirit.

"Her very faults would seem charming to some men," he told himself sagely. "That variableness which makes her at times the most incomprehensible of women, at other times the sweetest, would lead a fool on to his destruction. There was a day when I deemed her incapable of serious thought or unselfish work; yet, once awake to the sense of her obligations, there has been no limit to her patience and devotion."

And he was the author of this awakening. He felt a natural pride and delight in the knowledge of this. He was the Prometheus who had breathed the higher and more spiritual life into the nostrils of this lovely clay. He had snatched her from the narrow influences of her home; from the easy-going thoughtless father, whose mind hardly soared above the consideration of his cellar or his dinner-table; from the petty provincial society, with its petty gossip about its own works and ways, the fashion of its garments, and its dinings and tea-drinkings and trivial domestic details, from Mrs. Smith's new parlour-maid to Mrs. Brown's new bonnet. It was something to have lifted her from this slough of despond even to the outermost edge of a better world.

Yet she had flashes of the old leaven, intervals of retrogression that afflicted him sorely. During that homeward drive from the picnic she had been all that the most exacting of mankind could desire; sympathetic, confiding, understanding his every thought, and eager to be understood; candid, unaffected, womanly. But when the drive was over she had changed, as quickly as Cinderella at midnight's first fatal stroke. All the glorious vestments of her regenerated soul had dropped away, leaving the old familiar rags—the flippancy, the fastness, the insolence of conscious beauty. That earnest talk by the sundial, which Frederick Melvin had watched from afar with jealous eyes, had been in reality expostulation. The Curate had presumed to lecture his Vicar's daughter, not in an insolent hectoring spirit, not in a tone to which she could fairly object, but with a gentle gravity, regretful that she who had so many gifts should yet fall short of perfection.

"How can you talk such nonsense?" she exclaimed impetuously, with an angry movement of her graceful shoulders. "You know there is no one perfect, you know there is no one good. Are you not always hammering that at us in your sermons, making believe to consider us the veriest dirt—yes, even Mrs. Polwhele, of the Dene, in her new French bonnet? I don't

see any use in trying to please you. 'There never was but one perfect woman, and she is dead.'

"I do not think it very kind of you to speak like that," said Mr. Forde, "as if you grudged my praise of the dead."

"No, it is not that; but it seems hard that the living should suffer because—because you choose to brood upon the memory of some one who was better than they. I will not shape myself by any model, however perfect. Why," with a little bitter laugh, "if I were to become the faultless being you tell me I might make myself, my perfection would only be a plagiarism. I would rather be original, and keep my sins. Besides, what can my shortcomings matter to you?"

"They matter very much to me. Do you think I am interested in my congregation just for twenty minutes, while I am preaching to them, and that when I come down the pulpit-stairs all interest ceases till my next sermon?"

"You should reserve your lectures for Gertrude. She enjoys sermonising and being sermonised. I believe she keeps a journal of her spiritual progress. I daresay she would like to show it to you. No doubt you would find plenty of my sins duly booked *en parenthèse*."

"Your sister Gertrude is a very admirable person, and I was beginning to hope you would grow like her."

"Thanks for the compliment. If I am in any danger of resembling Gertrude, I shall leave off trying to be good the first thing to-morrow morning."

"Good-night, Miss Luttrell——"

"I am not Miss Luttrell. My name is Elizabeth."

"Good-night, Elizabeth," he said, very coldly; and before she could speak again he was gone, leaving her planted there by the sundial, angry with herself, and still more angry with him; passionately jealous of that memory which was more to him than the best and brightest of living creatures.

"Alice Fraser!" she said to herself. "Alice Fraser! A Scotch clergyman's daughter, a girl who never had a well-made gown in her life, I dare say. It was her portrait I saw over the mantelpiece in his sitting-room, no doubt. A poor little namby-pamby face, with pleading eyes always seeming to say, 'Forgive me for being a little better than everybody else.' And that cup and saucer under the glass shade! Hers, no doubt, used in her last illness. Poor girl! it was hard to be stricken down like that; and yet how sweet to die with his arms holding her, his agonised face bent over hers, his quivering lips bent close to hers to catch the last faint breath! What was there in that poor little meek-souled thing to hold him in life, and after death—to set a seal upon his strong heart, and keep it even in her grave? It is more than I can understand."

In the brief intervals of leisure which his daily duties left him—very brief at the best—Mr. Forde found his thoughts return with a strange persistency to the image of Elizabeth Luttrell. It was not that he saw her often, for they had not encountered each other since the picnic, the young lady having been absent when he paid his duty-call at the Vicarage. It was perhaps because she was less agreeable than other women; because she rebelled and defied him, and argued with him flippantly, where other damsels bowed down and worshipped; because she had never weakened her optic nerves by a laborious course of tent-stitch and satin-stitch; because she had refused to lead the choir of Sunday-school children, or to take a class in the Sunday-school; because she was in every respect, save in her late amendment in the district-visiting way, exactly what a clergyman's daughter ought not to be, that Malcolm Forde suffered his mind to dwell upon her in the dead watches of the night, and gave her a very disproportionate amount of his consideration at all times and seasons.

Of late he had been seriously disturbed about her; for shortly after the picnic there came a change in the damsel's conduct, a sad falling away in her district-visiting. The women whom she had attached to her bewailed this fact to Mr. Forde.

"I thought as how she'd been ill, poor dear," said one; "but when I went to church last Sunday, there she was, with her head held as high as ever, like a queen, bless her handsome face, and more colour in her cheeks than she used to have. She sent me a gownd last week by the vicarage housemaid, and a regular good one, not a brack in it; but though I was humbly thankful, I'd rather have seen her, as I used when she'd come and sit agen my wash-tub reading the Gospel."

He heard this lamentation, in different forms, from several women, and after some inquiry discovered that, except to visit a sick child, Elizabeth had not been among her people since the day of the picnic at Lawborough Beeches. She had sent them tea, and small benefactions of that kind, by the hand of a menial,—benefactions for which they were duly grateful,—but they missed her visits not the less.

"She's such good company," remarked one woman: "not like most of your districk-visitors, which make you feel that down-hearted as if you'd had a undertaker talkin' to you. She's got such pleasant lively ways, and yet as pitiful as pitiful if there's sickness. And she do make herself so at home in one's place. 'Let me dust your chimbleypiece, Mrs. Morris,' she says to me; and dusts it before I can look, and sets the things out so pretty, and brings me that there blue chaney vaise next day, bless her kind heart!"

Mr. Forde was deeply grieved by this falling off. It seemed

as if the Promethean spark had been untimely blown out. The beautiful clay was once more only clay. He felt unspeakably disheartened by the straying of this one lamb, which he had sought to gather into the fold.

Once possessed of his facts, he went straightway to the Vicarage to remonstrate.

"I do not care how obnoxious I render myself to her," he thought. "I am not here to speak smooth words. If her father neglects his duty, there is so much more reason I should do mine."

The year had grown six weeks older since the picnic. In summer time the Luttrell girls—with the exception of Gertrude, who was always busy—lived for the most part a straggling life, scattering themselves about garden and orchard, and doing all things in a desultory manner. In summer the Curate might have felt tolerably sure of finding Elizabeth alone under some favourite tree, reading a novel, or making believe to work. To-day it was different. The October afternoon was fine, but chill. He would have to seek his erring sister in the house, to inquire for the Vicar and the young ladies after the usual manner of visitors, and to take his chance of getting a few words alone with Elizabeth.

He looked right and left of the winding path as he went from the garden-gate to the house, but saw no glimpse of female apparel athwart the tall hollyhocks; so he was fain to go on to the hall-door. He was not particularly observant of details; but it struck him that the gray old house had a smarter aspect than usual. The carriage drive had been lately rolled; there was even some indication of a thin coating of new gravel. Muslin curtains that were unfamiliar to his eyes shrouded the bow-windows of the drawing-room, and a little yapping black-and-tan terrier—the veriest abbreviation of the dog species—flew out of a half-open door to gird at him as he rang the bell.

The vicarage parlour-maid—a young woman he had prepared for confirmation twelve months before—came smiling to admit him. Even she had an altered air—more starch in her gown, a smart white apron, cherry-coloured bows in her cap.

"Is Mr. Luttrell at home?"

"No, sir. Master went to Bulford in the pony-chaise with Miss Luttrell directly after lunch. But the other young ladies are in the drawing-room, sir, and Mrs. Chevenix."

He went into the hall—a square low-ceilinged chamber, embellished with antiquated cabinets of cracked oriental china; an ancient barometer; a pair of antlers, with a fox's brush lying across them, both trophies of the Vicar's prowess in the field; a smoky-looking piece of still-life, with the usual cut lemon and dead leveret and monster bunch of impossible grapes; the still

smokier portrait of an old gentleman of the pig-tail period; and sundry other specimens of art, which, massed into one lot of oddments at an auction, might possibly have realised a five-pound note.

“Mrs. Chevenix?” said the Curate interrogatively.

“Yes, sir—the young ladies’ aunt, sir—master’s sister?”

“O,” said Mr. Forde. He faintly remembered having heard of this lady—the well-to-do aunt and godmother who had given Diana the grand piano; an aunt who was sometimes alluded to confidently by Blanche as an authority upon all matters of taste and fashion; a person possessed of a universal knowledge, of the lighter sort; whose judgment as to the best book or the cleverest picture of the season was a judgment beyond dispute; who knew the ins and outs of life aristocratic and life diplomatic, and would naturally be one of the first persons to be informed of an approaching marriage in fashionable circles or an impending war.

Without ever having seen this lady, Mr. Forde had, from his inner consciousness, as it were, evolved some faint image of her, and the image was eminently distasteful to him. He disliked Mrs. Chevenix, more or less on the Dr. Fell principle. The reason why he could not tell, but he most assuredly did dislike her.

He could understand now that the new muslin curtains and the sprinkling of new gravel were expenses incurred in honour of this superior person. He kept his hat in his hand,—he would have left it in the hall most likely, had the young ladies been alone,—and thus armed, went in to be presented to Mrs. Chevenix.

“O, how do you do, Mr. Forde?” cried Diana, bouncing up from the hearthrug, where she had been caressing the infinitesimal terrier. “You are quite a stranger. We never see you now, except in church. Let me present you to my aunt, Mrs. Chevenix.”

He had a sense of something large and brown and rustling rising with a stately air between him and the light, and then slowly sinking into the luxurious depths of a capacious arm-chair; a chair not indigenous to the vicarage drawing-room, evidently an additional luxury provided for aunt Chevenix.

He had shaken hands with Diana, and bowed to aunt Chevenix—who maintained an aristocratic reserve on the subject of hand-shaking, and did not go about the world offering her hand to the first comer—in a somewhat absent-minded manner. He had performed these two ceremonies with his eyes wandering in quest of that other Miss Luttrell for whose special behalf he had come to the Vicarage.

She—Elizabeth—sat in a low chair by the fire, reading a

novel, the very picture of contented idleness. She too, like the house, seemed to him altered. Her garments had a more fashionable air. That Puritan simplicity she had assumed at the beginning of her career as a district-visitor was entirely discarded. She wore lockets and trinkets which he had not seen her wear of late, and rich plaits of dark brown hair were piled high on the graceful head, like the pictures in fashion-books.

She rose now to greet him with a languid air, an elegant indifference of manner which he surmised had been imparted by the stately personage in lustrous brown silk. They shook hands coldly enough on both sides, and Elizabeth resumed her seat, with her book open in her lap.

Mrs. Chevenix sat with her portly brown-silk back towards the bow window. It was one of Mrs. Chevenix's principles to sit with her back to the light, whereby a *souçon* of pearl-powder and hair-dye was rendered less obvious to the observer. A beauty had Mrs. Chevenix been in her time, ay, and as acknowledged a beauty as Elizabeth Luttrell herself, although it would have cost Malcolm Forde a profound effort of faith to believe that vivid flashing brunette loveliness of Elizabeth's could ever develop into the fleshly charms of the matron. But in certain circles, and in her own estimation, Mrs. Chevenix still took high rank as a fine woman. She had arrived at that arid full-blown stage of existence in which a woman can only be distinguished as fine, in which a carefully preserved figure and a complexion eked out by art are the last melancholy vestiges of departed beauty.

She was a large person, with a large aquiline-nosed countenance framed by broad-plaited bands of flaxen hair. Her cheeks bloomed with the florid bloom of middle age, delicately toned down by a judicious application of pearl-powder; her arched eyebrows were several shades darker than her hair, and a little too regular for nature; her eyes were blue—cold calculating eyes, which looked as if they had never beheld the outer world as anything better than a theatre for the advancement and gratification of self; or at least this was the idea which those chilly azure orbs inspired in the mind of Mr. Forde as he sat opposite the lady, talking small talk and telling Diana Luttrell the news of his parish.

Mrs. Chevenix had a certain good-society manner which was as artificial as her eyebrows, or the bluish-white tints that toned her cheek-bones; and of this manner she kept two samples always in stock—the gushing and vivacious style which she affected with people whom she deemed her superiors, the listless and patronising, or secondary manner, wherewith she gratified her inferiors.

It was of course not likely she would take the trouble to gush

for her brother's curate, even though he might be a person of decent family, and possessed of independent means. Had he been an "Honourable," a scion, however remote, of some distinguished house in the peerage, she would have beamed upon him with her most entrancing smiles. But an unknown Scotchman; a man who had been described to her as terribly in earnest; a person of revolutionary principles, who set himself against the existing order of things, wanting to reform this and that, and perhaps to level the convenient barriers which keep the common herd in their proper places; a dismal person, no doubt, full of strange wailings, like the ancient prophets, whom she heard wonderingly sometimes at church, giving them just as much attention as she could spare from the fair vista of new bonnets shining in a shaft of light from the gothic window, and who seemed to her to have been distracted personages eminently ineligible for dinner-parties.

"Aunt Chevenix missed your sermon last Sunday morning, Mr. Forde," said Diana. "She had one of her headaches, and was afraid the church might be hot."

"In October?" said Mr. Forde, smiling. "Our congregation is not vast enough for that." He did not express any regret about his loss of such a hearer as aunt Chevenix.

"I am really fond of a good sermon," remarked the lady blandly, trifling with a shining black fan, wherewith she was wont to flap the empty air at all times and seasons. This fan, a gold-rimmed eye-glass, and a double-headed scent-bottle, were Mrs. Chevenix's only means of employment, after she had read the *Morning Post* and accomplished her diurnal tale of letter-writing. "And good sermons are become so rare," she went on in her slow pompous way. "I have heard no eloquent preacher for the last five years, except the Bishop of Granchester."

"You would not say that if you had heard Mr. Forde," said Diana.

Mrs. Chevenix put up her eyeglass and looked at the Curate with a languid smile, as if with the aid of that instrument she were able to make a precise estimate of his powers.

"Mr. Forde is a young man, my dear. It is hardly fair to name him in the same breath with the bishop."

Elizabeth, who had been turning the leaves of her book listlessly with an air of absolute inattention, flashed out at this.

"Mr. Forde is natural," she said, "which is more than I can say for the bishop. I admit his eloquence, his grand bass voice, sinking to an almost awful solemnity at every climax. But it seems to me a tutored eloquence. I could fancy him an actor in a Greek play, declaiming behind a mask. Mr. Forde"—a sudden pause, as if she had been going to say a great deal, and had hastily checked herself—"is different."

Malcolm Forde listened with eyes bent on the ground; but just at the last words he raised those dark deep-set eyes, and glanced at the speaker. What a splendid face it was, with its look of intense life, its scorn of scorn, or love of love; a nature in all things intensified, like that typical poet who in a golden clime was born.

"Yes, she *is* a noble creature," he said to himself. "No matter how capricious, or fickle, or unstable. She is a creature of fire and light, and she shall not be lost, not for all the aunt Chevenixes in the world."

He cast a swift glance of defiance at the harmless matron in brown silk and flaxen plaits crowned with blonde and artificial roses, as if she had been the foul fiend himself, and he playing a desperate game of chess with her for this fair young soul. He had always disliked the family fetish, when she had been only a remote and unknown image to be invoked ever when there was question of the proprieties. But he disliked her most of all now, when she was seated within the citadel, and was poisoning the atmosphere of Elizabeth's home with her worldly spirit.

He was swift to condemn and to suspect, perhaps, since he had seen very little of the lady as yet; but that inane small-talk, that stale gossip of Eaton-square and Lancaster-gate, that bismuth-shaded cheek, that practicable eyebrow, which elevated itself with a trained expression of irony, or drooped with a studied languour—all these artificialities told him the nature of the woman, and told him that she was the last of creatures whom he would care to see in daily communion with a girl whose wayward disposition had of late been curiously interesting to him.

That dogmatic assertion of his superiority even to a bishop, hurled at the very teeth of the family idol, pleased him mightily. It was not conceit that was gratified—it was sweet to him to discover that, in spite of all her affected scorn, this girl appreciated him.

He did not acknowledge her compliment, except by one brief smile—that slow quiet curve of the firm thoughtful lips, which was sweeter than common smiles. He went on patiently with the morning-caller talk, listened tolerantly to small scraps of information about the Lancaster-gateites, until he could fairly rise to depart. But he did not mean to leave the Vicarage with his mission unfulfilled.

"Will you give me a few minutes in the garden?" he said, in a low voice, as he shook hands with Elizabeth. "I want to talk to you about your cottagers."

The ears of the Chevenix, more acute than those chilly blue eyes which required the aid of binoculars, pricked up at this sound of confidential converse.

“Did I hear you say something about cottagers, Mr. Forde?” she demanded sharply.

“Yes,” he replied. “I was speaking of that order of creatures.” He was strongly tempted to add, “who do not inhabit Lancaster-gate,” but judiciously held his peace.

“Then I must beg that you do not put any more nonsense about district-visiting into my niece’s head. It is all very well for Gertrude, who is strong, physically and mentally, and is not of so impressionable a nature as Elizabeth, and is some years older, into the bargain. I consider there is more than enough done for the poor in this place. My brother gives away half his income, and spends as much of his time amongst his parishioners as—as—his health will permit. Besides which he has of course a powerful auxiliary in his curate, whose duty it is, naturally, to devote himself to that kind of thing. And then there are always maiden ladies in a place—good-hearted dowdy souls, who delight in that sort of work; so that you can hardly be in want of aid. But, however that may be, I cannot possibly allow my niece to fatigue herself and excite herself as she has done at your suggestion. I found her in a really low state when I came here—depressed in spirits, and nervous to the last degree.”

Elizabeth flamed crimson at this.

“How can you talk such nonsense, aunt?” she cried angrily, being the only one of the sisters who was not habitually over-awed by aunt Chevenix. “I am sure I was well enough; but those London doctors put such twaddle into your head.”

Mrs. Chevenix sighed gently, and gravely shook the head which was accused of harbouring professional twaddle.

“If your niece is to go to heaven, I fancy she will have to travel by her own line of country, without reference to you, Mrs. Chevenix,” said Malcolm Forde. “I do not think she will submit to be forbidden to do her duty among her father’s flock. It is not a question of just what is most conducive to health or high spirits. I do not say that I would have *her*”—this with an almost tender emphasis on the pronoun—“sacrifice health or length of years even for the holiest work, but we know such sacrifices are only the natural expression of her perfect faith. I am not asking her to do anything hard or unpleasant, however. For her, the yoke may be of the easiest, the burden of the lightest. If you knew, as I do, how in two or three months she has contrived to win the hearts of these people—what good her influence may do almost unconsciously on her part—I think you would hardly talk about forbidding her to give some time and thought to her father’s poor.”

He spoke warmly, and it was the first time that anything approaching praise had dropped from his lips. Elizabeth looked

at him with a glowing face, dark eyes that brightened as they looked.

"Thank you, Mr. Forde," she said; "I did not know I was of any use, and I got disheartened; and when aunt Chevenix came, I gave the business up altogether. But I shall begin again to-morrow."

Aunt Chevenix stared at Elizabeth, and from Elizabeth to Mr. Forde, with a stony stare of speechless indignation.

"O, very well, my dear," she said to her niece at last. "Of course, you must know best what is conducive to your own happiness." And then she sniffed a sniff, as who should say, "I can bequeath my money elsewhere. You have sisters, my foolish Elizabeth, as dependent as yourself. I can instruct my solicitor to prepare a codicil revoking that clause in my will which has reference to your interests."

Mr. Forde had gained his point, and cared very little what smothered fires might be glowing in the Chevenix breast. Elizabeth went out into the garden with him, bare-headed, heedless of a chill October nor-wester, and heard all he could tell her about her neglected poor, questioning him eagerly.

"Poor souls, are they really fond of me?" she exclaimed remorsefully. "I did not know it was in me to do any good."

On this Malcolm Forde grew eloquent, told her as he had never told her before the value of such a soul as hers, gifted with rare capabilities, with powers so far above life's ordinary level; urged her to rise superior to her surroundings, to be something greater and better than the common new-bonnet-worshipping young-ladyhood of Hawleigh.

"I am not depreciating your home or your family, Elizabeth," he said, remembering that she had accorded him this free use of her Christian name; "but the world has grown so worldly, even religion seems to have lost its spirituality. There is a trading spirit, an assumption of fashion, in our very temples. Indeed, I am sometimes doubtful whether our floral decorations and embroidered altar-cloths are not a delusion and a snare. It should be good to make our churches beautiful: yet there are moments when I doubt the wisdom of these things. They make too direct an appeal to the senses. I find myself yearning for the stern simplicity of the Scottish Church—that unembellished service which Edward Living could make so vast an instrument for the regeneration of mankind. He had no flower-decked chancel, no white-robed choir. It was only a voice crying in the city-wilderness."

This he said meditatively, straying from the chief subject of his discourse, and giving expression almost involuntarily to a doubt that had been tormenting him of late. He brought him-

self back to the more personal question of Elizabeth's spiritual welfare presently.

"Why did you keep away from your people?" he asked. "Were you really ill? Or was it your aunt's influence?"

She looked at him with a mischievous daring in her eyes.

"Neither one nor the other."

"Then why was it? You had been going on so well and so steadily, and I was beginning to be proud of you. I trust—" this slowly, and with hesitation—"I trust there was nothing I said that day at the picnic which could have a deterring influence, or which could have offended you."

"I was not offended," she answered, her lips quivering faintly, her face turned away from him. "What was there to offend me? Only you made me feel myself so poor a creature, my highest efforts so infinitely beneath your ideal of perfect womanhood, my feeble struggles at self-improvement so mean and futile measured by your heroic standard, that I did perhaps feel a little discouraged, and a little inclined to give up striving to make myself what nature had evidently not intended me to be—an estimable woman."

"Nature intended you to be good and great," answered Mr. Forde earnestly.

"But not like Alice Fraser," said Elizabeth, with a bitter smile.

"There are different kinds of perfection. Hers was an innate and unconscious purity, a limitless power of self-sacrifice. She was the ideal daughter of the manse, a creature who had never known a selfish thought, to whom the labours which I press upon you as a duty were a second nature. She had never lived except for others. I cannot say less or more of her than I told you that day—she was simply perfect. Yet you have gifts which she did not possess—a more energetic nature, a quicker intelligence. There is no good or noble work a woman can do in this world that you could not do, if you chose."

Elizabeth shook her head doubtfully.

"I have no endurance," she said; "I am vain and feeble. O, believe me, I have by no means a lofty estimate of my own character. I require to be sustained by constant praise. It is all very well while you are encouraging me, I feel capable of anything; but when I have gone plodding on for two or three months longer, and you take my good conduct for granted, I shall grow weary again, and fall away again."

"Not if you will look to a higher source for support and inspiration. My praises are a very poor reward. Trust to the approval of your own conscience rather; and forgive me if I urge you to keep yourself free from the influence of Mrs. Chevenix. It seems impertinent in me, no doubt, to presume to judge a lady I have only seen for half an hour——"

“O, pray don't apologise,” exclaimed Elizabeth in her careless way; “I have a perfect appreciation of aunt Chevenix. She is the family idol; the goddess whom we all worship, conciliating her with all manner of sacrifices of our inclinations. She presides over us in spirit even when at a distance, imparting her oracles in letters. Of course she is the very essence of worldliness. Is it not written in all the roses that garnish her cap? But she married a clever barrister, who blossomed in due course into a county-court judge, and died five years ago of a fit of apoplexy, which was considered the natural result of a prolonged series of dinners, leaving aunt Chevenix fifteen hundred a year at her own disposal. She never had any children, and we four girls are all she can boast of in the way of nephews or nieces, so it is an understood thing that the fifteen hundred a year must ultimately come to us, and we are paying aunt Chevenix in advance for her bounty, by deferring to her in all things. She is not half so bad as you might suppose from her little pompons ways and her fan and eyeglass; and I really think she is fond of us.”

Not a pleasing confession to a man of Malcolm Forde's temperament from the lips of a beautiful girl. This waiting for dead men's shoes was of all modern vices the one that seemed to him meanest.

“I hope you will not allow your conduct to be influenced by any consideration of your reversionary interest in Mrs. Chevenix's income,” he said gravely.

“You need have no fear of that,” she answered lightly. “I never took any one's advice in my life—except perhaps yours—and as to being dictated to by aunt Chevenix, that is quite out of the question. I am the only one of the family who defies her; and, strange to say, I enjoy the reputation of being her favourite.”

“I don't wish you to defy her,” said Mr. Forde, with his serious smile. She seemed to him at some moments only a wayward child, this girl whom he was urging to become good and great. “You may be all that a niece should be—kind, affectionate, and respectful—and yet retain your right of judgment.”

He looked at his watch. He had been at the Vicarage more than an hour, and half that time had been spent walking to and fro beside the autumnal china-asters and chrysanthemums, with Elizabeth for his companion.

“I have detained you longer than I intended,” he said. “I shall tell Mrs. Morris and Mrs. Brown that you are coming to see them. Good-bye.”

He stood by the broad barred gate—a homely farmhouse looking gate, painted white—a tall vigorous figure, unclerical &

aspect, with the erect soldierly air that had not departed from him on his change of profession, a man who looked like a leader of men, the dark earnest eyes looking downward at Elizabeth, the broad strong hand clasping hers with the firm clasp of friendship. Verily a tower of strength such a friend as this, worth a legion of the common clay which men and women count as friends.

Elizabeth stood by the gate watching him as he walked along the white high-road towards Hawleigh.

"He looks like a red-cross knight disguised in modern costume," she said to herself; "he looks like Hercules in a frock-coat. How different from slim little Mr. Adderley, picking his steps upon the dusty causeway. And now he will go from house to house, and teach, and read, and exhort, and help, and counsel, till ten o'clock to-night, with only just time for a hasty dinner between his labours. And yet he is never weary, and never thinks his life barren, and never longs to be in London among happy crowds of refined men and women enjoying all the delights that the science of pleasure can devise for them—operas, and concerts, and races, and picture-shows, and flower shows, and a hundred gatherings together of taste, and beauty, and refinement. Does he ever long for that kind of life, I wonder, the very fringe or outer edge of which is delightful, if one may believe aunt Chevenix? Or does he languish for a roving life—as I do sometimes—among fair strange countries, sailing on the blue waters of the Adriatic or the Archipelago, among the sunny islands of the old Greek world, or wandering in the shady depths of the black forest, or on thymy mountain tops, or amidst regions of everlasting snow? Has he no hours of vain despondency and longing, as I have? Or did he concentrate all his hopes and desires upon Alice Fraser, and bury them all in her grave?"

She was in no hurry to return to the drawing-room fireside and the Chevenix atmosphere of genteel idleness. Instead of going back to the house, she went from the garden to the orchard, and paced that grassy slope alone, circulating slowly among the mossgrown trunks of the apple and cherry trees, thinking of Malcolm Forde.

"How good he is," she said to herself; "how earnest, how real! What a king among men! And yet what hope is there for him in life? what prospect of escape from this dull drudgery, which he must surely sicken of, sooner or later? He has no interest that can advance him in the Church—I have heard him say that—so his preferment will most likely be of the slowest. I hardly wonder that he sometimes thinks of turning missionary. Better to be something—to win some kind of name in the centre of Africa, or among the South-Sea Islands—than to be buried alive in such a place as Hawleigh. And if he ever

were to change his mind and marry, what a brilliant career for his wife!" She laughed bitterly at the thought. "How I pity that poor demented soul, whoever she may be! And yet he seems to consider this kind of life perfect, and that one might be good and great; goodness and greatness consisting in perpetual district-visiting, unlimited plain needlework for the Dorcas society, unflinching attendance at early services—all the dull, dull routine of a Christian life. Of the two careers, I should certainly prefer Africa!"

Thus did she argue with herself, this rebellious soul, who could not understand that life was intended to afford her anything but pleasure, the kind of pleasure her earthly nature pined for—operas, and concerts, and horses and carriages, and foreign travel. She roamed the orchard for nearly an hour, meditating upon Malcolm Forde, his character, his aspirations, his prospects, and that hypothetical foolish woman who might be rash enough to accept him for her husband; and then went back to the drawing-room, to be sharply interrogated by aunt Chevenix.

"My dear Elizabeth, what a dishevelled creature you have made yourself!" exclaimed that lady, looking with disfavour at Lizzie's loosened hair and disordered neck ribbon. The young ladies of Eaton-place rarely exposed themselves to the wind, except at Brighton in November, when a certain license might be permitted.

"I have been walking in the orchard, aunt. It's rather blowy on that side of the house."

"I hope you have not had that Mr. Forde with you all this time."

"Mr. Forde has been gone nearly an hour. I wish you wouldn't call him *that* Mr. Forde. You may not mean anything by it, but it sounds unpleasant."

"But I do mean something by it," replied aunt Chevenix, fanning herself more vehemently than usual. "I mean that your Mr. Forde is a most arrogant, disagreeable, under-bred person to presume to dictate to my niece—to over-ride my authority before my very face! The man is evidently utterly unaccustomed to good society."

"You might have said that of St. Peter or St. Paul, aunt," replied Elizabeth in her coolest manner; "neither of those belonged to the Eaton-place section of society. But Mr. Forde is a man of good family, and was in a crack cavalry regiment before he entered the Church. So you are out in your reckoning."

"A crack regiment!" echoed the matron. "Elizabeth, you have acquired a most horrible mode of expression. Perhaps you have learnt that from Mr. Forde, as well as a new version of your duty to your relations. If ever that man was in a cavalry regiment, I should think it must have been in the capacity of

rough-rider. What a man-mountain the creature is, too! I should hardly have thought any sane bishop would have ordained such a giant. There ought really to be a standard height for the Church as well as for the army, excluding pigmies and giants. I never beheld a man so opposite to one's ideal of a curate."

"O, of course," cried Elizabeth impatiently. "Your ideal curate is a slim simpering thing with white hands—a handbox-ical being, talking solemn small-talk like a fashionable doctor—a kettledrumish-man, always dropping in at afternoon tea. We have had three of that species, varying only in detail. Thank heaven Malcolm Forde is something better than that."

"I cannot perceive that you have any occasion to feel grateful to Providence upon the subject of Mr. Forde's character and attributes, let them be what they may," said Mrs. Chevenix; "and I consider that familiar mention of your father's curate—a paid servant remember, like a governess or a cook—to the last degree indecorous."

"But I do thank heaven for him," cried Elizabeth recklessly. "He is my friend and counsellor,—the only man I ever looked up to——"

"You appear to forget that you have a father," murmured Mrs. Chevenix, sitting like a statue, with her closed fan laid across her breast, in a stand-at-ease manner.

"I don't forget anything of the kind; but I never looked up to *him*. It isn't in human nature to reverence one's father. One is behind the scenes of his life, you see. One knows all his little impatiences, his unspiritual views on the subject of dinner, his intolerance of crumpled roseleaves in his domestic arrangements. Papa is a dear old thing, but he is of the earth, earthy. Mr. Forde is of another quality,—spiritual, earnest, self-sacrificing, somewhat arbitrary, perhaps, in the consciousness of his own strength, but gentle even when he commands; capable of a heroic life which my poor feeble brain cannot even imagine; his eager spirit even now yearning to carry God's truth to some wretched people buried in creation's primeval gloom; ready to die a martyr in some nameless Isle of the Pacific, in some unknown desert in Central Africa. He is my modern St. Paul, and I reverence him."

Elizabeth indulged herself with this small tirade half in earnest, half in a mocking spirit, amusing herself with the discomfiture of aunt Chevenix, who sat staring at her in speechless horror.

"The girl is stark mad!" gasped the matron, with a faint flutter of her fan, slowly recovering speech and motion. "Has this sort of thing been going on long, Diana?"

"Well, not quite so bad as this," replied Diana; "but I don't think Lizzie has been quite herself since she took up the

district-visiting. She has left off wearing nice gloves, and dressing for dinner, and behaving in a general way like a Christian."

"Has she, indeed?" said aunt Chevenix; "then the district-visiting must be put a stop to at once and for ever, or it will leave her stranded high and dry on the barren shore of old-maidism. You may be a very pretty girl, Elizabeth Luttrell—I dare say you know you are tolerably good-looking, so there's no use in my pretending you are not—but if once you take up ultra-religious views, visiting the poor, and all that kind of thing, I wash my hands of you. I had hoped to see you make a brilliant marriage; indeed I have heard you talk somewhat over-confidently of your carriage, your opera-box, your town house and country seat. But from what I hear to-day, I conclude your highest ambition is to marry this preposterous curate—who looks a great deal more like a brigand chief, by the way—and devote your future existence to Sunday-school teaching and tea-meetings."

Elizabeth stood tall and straight before her accuser, with clasped hands resting on the back of a prie-dieu chair, exactly as she had stood while she delivered her small rhapsody about Mr. Forde, stately and spiritual-looking as Joan of Arc inspired by her "voices."

"Perhaps, after all, it might be a woman's loftiest ambition to mate with Malcolm Forde," she said slowly, with a tender dreamy look in her eyes; and then, before the dragon could remonstrate, she went on with a sudden change of manner, "Don't be alarmed, auntie; I am not going to hold the world well lost for love. I mean to have my opera-box, if it ever comes begging this way, and to give great dinners, with cabinet ministers and foreign ambassadors for my guests, and to be mistress of a country seat or two, and do wonderful things at elections, and to be stared at at country race-meetings, and to tread in that exalted path in which you would desire to train my ignorant footstep.

Mrs. Chevenix gave a half-despairing sigh.

"You are a most incomprehensible girl," she said, "and give me more trouble of mind than your three sisters put together. But I do hope that you will keep clear of any entanglement with that tall curate, a dangerous man I am convinced; any flirtation of that kind would inevitably compromise you in the future. As to cabinet dinners and country seats, such marriages as you talk of are extremely rare nowadays, and for a Devonshire parson's daughter to make such a match would be a kind of miracle. But with your advantages you ought certainly to marry well; and it is better to look too high than too low. A season in London might do wonders."

This London season was the shining bait which Mrs. Chevenix was wont to dangle before the eyes of her nieces, and by virtue of which she obtained their submission to her amiable caprices when the more remote advantage of inheritance might have failed to influence them. Gertrude and Diana had enjoyed each her season, and had not profited thereby in any substantial manner. They had been "much admired," Mrs. Chevenix declared with an approving air, especially Diana, as the livelier of the two; but admiration had not taken that definite form for which the soul of the match-maker longeth.

"There must be something wanting," Mrs. Chevenix said pensively, in moments of confidence. "I find that something wanting in most of the girls of the present day. Alfred Chevenix proposed to me in my first season. I was a thoughtless thing just emerged from the nursery, and his was not my only offer. But my nieces made a very different effect. Young men were attentive to them—Sir Harold Hawbuck even seemed struck with Diana—but nothing came of it. There must be a deficiency in something. Gertrude is too serious, Diana a shade too flippant. It is manner, my dear, manner, in which the rising generation is wanting."

"A season in town," cried Elizabeth, her dark eyes sparkling, her head lifted with a superb arrogance, and all thought of Malcolm Forde and the life spiritual for the moment banished. "Yes, it is my turn, is it not, auntie? and I think it is time I came out. Who knows how soon I may begin to lose whatever good looks I now possess? I am of a nervous temper; impressionable, as you suggested just now. I have a knack of sleeping badly when my mind is full of a subject, and excitement of any kind spoils my appetite. Even the idea of a new bonnet will keep me awake. I lie tossing from side to side all night trying to determine whether it shall be pink or blue. Living at this rate, I may be a positive fright before I am twenty; no complexion can stand against such wear and tear."

"You have been allowed to grow up with a sadly undisciplined mind, my poor child," Mrs. Chevenix said sententially. "If your papa had engaged a competent governess, a person who had lived in superior families, and was experienced in the training of the human mind and the figure—your waist measures two inches more than it ought to at your age—his daughters would have done him much greater credit. But it was only like my brother Wilmot to grudge the expenditure of sixty guineas a year for a proper instructress of his daughters, while frittering away hundreds on his pauper parishioners."

"Now, that is one of the things for which I do reverence

papa," cried Elizabeth with energy. "Thank heaven, neither our minds nor our bodies have been trained by a professional trainer. Imagine growing like a fruit tree nailed against a wall; every spontaneous outshoot of one's character cut back, every impulse pruned away as a non-fruit-bearing branch! I do bless papa with all my free untutored soul for having spared us that. But don't let us quarrel about details, dear auntie. Give me my season in London, and see what I will do. I languish for my opera-box and barouche, and the kind of life one reads of in Mrs. Gore's novels."

"You shall spend next May and June with me," said Mrs. Chevenix with another plaintive sigh. "It will be hard work going over all the same ground again which I went over for Gerty and Di, but the result may be more brilliant."

"Couldn't you manage to turn me off at the same time, auntie?" demanded Blanche pertly.

"I am sorry Gertrude and I were not fortunate enough to receive proposals from dukes or merchant princes," said Diana, whose aristocratic features had flushed angrily at her aunt's implied complaint. "Perhaps we might have been luckier if we had met more people of that kind. But of course Lizzie will do wonders. She reminds me of Mirabeau's remark about Robespierre; she will do great things, because she believes in herself."

Elizabeth was prompt to respond to this attack; and so, with small sisterly bickerings, the conversation ended.

CHAPTER VII

"Je ne voudrais pas, si j'étais Julie,
N'être que jolie
Avec ma beauté.
Jusqu'au bout des doigts je serais duchesse.
Comme ma richesse
J'aurais ma fierté."

ELIZABETH, having in a manner pledged herself to a career of worldly-mindedness, to begin in the ensuing spring, deemed herself at liberty to follow her own inclinations in the interim, and these inclinations pointed to the kind of life which Malcolm Forde wished her to lead. She went back to her district-work on the morning after the Curate's visit; put on her Puritan hat and sober gray carmelite gown, which seemed to her mind the whole armour of righteousness, and went back to her people. She was welcomed back with an affection that at once

surprised and touched her. She had done so little for them—only treating them and thinking of them as creatures of the same nature as herself—and yet they were so grateful, and so fond of her.

So Elizabeth went back to what Gertrude called her “duties,” and the soul of aunt Chevenix was heavy within her. That lady had cherished high hopes upon the subject of this lovely niece of hers. A perfect beauty in a family is a fortune in embryo. There was no knowing what transcendent heights upon the vast mountain range of “good society” such a girl as Elizabeth might scale, dragging her kith and kin upwards with her; provided she were but plastic in the hands of good advisers. To scheme, to plan, to diplomatise, were natural operations of the Chevenix mind. A childless widow, with a comfortable income and a somewhat extended circle of acquaintance, could hardly spend all her existence with no more mental pabulum than a fan and a scent-bottle, and the trivial amenities of polite life. Mrs. Chevenix’s intellect must have lapsed into stagnation but for the agreeable employment afforded by social diplomacy. She knew everything about everybody; kept a mental ledger in which she registered all the little weaknesses of her acquaintance; and had even a journal wherein a good deal of genteel scandal was booked in pen and ink. But although by no means essentially good-natured, she was not a mischief-maker, and no unfriendly criticism or lady-like scandal had ever been brought home to her. She was, on the other hand, renowned as a peace-maker: and if she had a fault, it was a species of amiable officiousness, which some of her acquaintance were inclined inwardly to resent. Malign tongues had called Mrs. Chevenix a busybody; but in the general opinion she was a lady of vivacious and agreeable manners, who gave snug little dinners, and elegant little suppers after concerts and operas; and was a fine figure for garden parties, or a spare seat at the dinner-table; a lady who had done some good service in the way of match-making, and who exercised considerable influence over the minds of divers young matrons whom she had assisted in the achievement of their matrimonial successes.

It seemed a hard thing that, after having been so useful an ally to various damsels who were only the protégées of the hour, Mrs. Chevenix’s diplomatic efforts in relation to her own nieces should result in utter failure. She had never hoped very much from Gertrude, who had that air of being too good for this world, which of all things is the most repellent to sinful man. Still, even for Gertrude Mrs. Chevenix had done her best, bravely, and with the sublime patience engendered by profound experience of this mundane sphere, its difficulties and disappointments. She had exhibited her seriously-minded niece at

charity bazaars, at déjeuners given after the inauguration of church organs, at choir festivals, and even—with a noble sacrifice of personal inclination—at Sunday-school tea-drinkings, orphanage fêtes, and other assemblages of what this worldly-minded matron called the goody-goody school. She had angled for popular preachers, for rectors and vicars, the value of whose benefices she had looked up in the Clergy-list; but she had cast her lines in vain. The popular preachers, crying from their pulpits that all is vanity, were yet caught, moth-like, by the flame of worldly beauties, and left Gertrude to console herself with the calm contemplation of her own virtues, and the conviction that they were somewhat too lofty for the appreciation of vulgar clay. It had happened thus, that with the advent of Malcolm Forde, the eldest Miss Luttrell fancied she had at last met the clect and privileged individual predestined to sympathise with, and understand her; the man upon whose broad forehead she at once recognised the apostolic grace, and who, she fondly hoped, would hail in her the typical maiden of the church primitive and undefiled, the Dorcas or Lydia of modern civilisation. It had been a somewhat bitter disappointment, therefore, to discover that Mr. Forde, although prompt with the bestowal of his confidence and friendship, was very slow to exhibit any token of a warmer regard. Surely he, so different in every attribute from all former curates, was not going to resemble them in their foolish worship at the shrine of Elizabeth. So long as this damsel had stuck to her accustomed line of worldliness, Gertrude had scarcely trembled. But when her younger sister all of a sudden subdued her somewhat reckless spirit, and took to district-visiting, Miss Luttrell's heart sank within her. She had no belief in the reality of this conversion. It was a glaring and bold-faced attempt at the Curate's subjugation, to bend that stiff neck beneath the yoke which had been worn so patiently by the flute-playing, verse-quoting Levites of the past. And Gertrude did not hesitate to express herself in somewhat bitter phrases to that effect.

When Diana came to Eaton-place for the season, the hopes of aunt Chevenix rose higher. The second Miss Luttrell was decidedly handsome, in the aquiline-nosed style, and was as decidedly stylish; wore her country-made gowns with an air which made them pass for the handicraft of a West-end mantua-maker; dressed her own hair with a skill which would have done credit to an experienced lady's maid; and seemed altogether an advantageous young person for whom to labour. Yet Diana's season, though brightened by many a hopeful ray, had been barren of results. Perhaps these girls in their aunt's house were too obviously "on view." Mrs. Chevenix's renown as a match-maker may have gone against them; her past suc-

cesses may have induced this present failure. And if Gertrude erred on the side of piety, Diana possibly went a thought too far in the matter of worldliness. She was clever and imitative, and caught up the manners of more experienced damsels with a readiness that was perhaps too ready. She had perhaps a trifle too much confidence in herself; too much of the *veni, vidi, vici* style; went into battle with "An opera-box and a house in Hyde-park-gardens" blazoned on her banner; and after suffering the fitful fever of high hopes that alternate with blank despair, Diana was fain to go back to Hawleigh Vicarage without being able to boast of any definite offer.

But with Elizabeth, Mrs. Chevenix told herself, things would be utterly different. She possessed that rare beauty which always commands attention. She was as perfect in her line as those heaven-born winners of the Derby, Oaks, and Leger, which, by their performances as two-year-olds, proclaim themselves at once the conquerors of the coming year. Fairly good-looking girls were abundant enough every season, just as fairly good horses abound at every sale of yearlings throughout the sporting year; but there was as much difference between Elizabeth Luttrell and the common herd of pretty girls—all more or less dependent on the style of their bonnets, or the dressing of their hair for their good looks—as between the fifty-guinea colt, whose good points excite vague hopes of future merit in the breast of the speculative buyer, and a lordling of a crack stable, with a pedigree half a yard long, knocked down for two or three thousand guineas to some maguate of the turf, amidst the applause of the auction-yard.

"Elizabeth cannot fail to marry well, unless she behaves like an idiot, and throws herself away upon some pauper curate," said Mrs. Chevenix: "there is no position to which a girl with her advantages may not aspire—and I shall make it my business so give her plenty of opportunities—unless she is obstinately bent upon standing in her own light. This district-visiting business must be put a stop to immediately; it is nothing more than an excuse for flirting with that tall curate."

Mrs. Chevenix was not slow to warn her brother, the Vicar, of this peril which menaced his handsomest daughter; but he who was the easiest-tempered and least-designing of mankind, received her information with a provoking coolness.

"I really can't see how I could object to Lizzie's visiting the poor," he said. "It has always been a trouble to me that my daughters, with the exception of Gertrude, have done so little. If Forde has brought about a better state of things in this matter, as he has in a good deal besides, I don't see that I can complain of the improvement because it is his doing. And I don't think you need alarm yourself with regard to any danger

of love-making or matrimony between those two. Forde has somewhat advanced notions, and doesn't approve of a priest marrying. He has almost said as much in the pulpit, and I think the Hawleigh girls have left off setting their caps at him."

"Men are not always constant in their opinions," said Mrs. Chevenix. "I wouldn't give much for any declaration Mr. Forde may have made in the pulpit. It was very bad taste in him to advance any opinion of that kind, I think, when his vicar is a married man and the father of a family."

"Forde belongs to the new school," replied Mr. Luttrell, with his good-natured air. "Perhaps he sometimes sails a trifle too near the wind in the matter of asceticism; but he's the best curate I ever had."

"Why doesn't he go over to Rome, and have done with it," exclaimed aunt Chevenix angrily; "I have no patience with such a wolf in sheep's clothing. And I have no patience with you, Wilmot, when I see your handsomest daughter throwing herself away before your eyes."

"But I don't see anything of the kind, Maria," said the Vicar, gently rolling his fingers round a cigar which he meant to smoke in the orchard as soon as he could escape from his tormentor. "As to playing the spy upon my children—watching their flirtations with Jones, or speculating upon their penchant for Robinson, I think you ought to know by this time that I am the very last of men to do anything of that kind."

"Which means in plain English that you are too selfish and too indifferent to trouble yourself about the fate of your daughters. You ought to have had sons, Wilmot; young scapegraces, who would have ruined you with university debts, or gone on the turf and dragged your name through the mire in that way."

"I have not been blessed with sons," murmured Mr. Luttrell in his laziest tone. "If I had been favoured in that way, so soon as they arrived at an eligible age, I should have exported them. I should have obtained a government grant of land in Australia or British Columbia, and planted them out. I consider emigration the natural channel for the disposal of surplus sons."

"You ought never to have married, Wilmot. You ought to have been one of those dreadful abbots one reads of, who had trout-streams running through their kitchens, and devoted all the strength of their minds to eating and drinking, and actually wallowed in venison and larded capons."

"Those ancient abbots had by no means a bad time of it, my dear," replied the Vicar, with supreme good humour, "and they had plenty of broken victuals to feed their poor with, which I have not."

"I want to know what you are going to do about Elizabeth,"

said Mrs. Chevenix, rapping the table with her fan, and returning to the charge in a determined manner.

“What I am going to do about Elizabeth, my love? Simply nothing. Would you have me lock her up in the Norman tower, like a princess in a fairy tale, so that she should not behold the face of man till I chose to introduce her to a husband of my own selection? All the legendary lore we possess tends to show the futility of that sort of domestic tyranny. I consider your apprehensions altogether premature and groundless; but if it is Lizzie’s destiny to marry Malcolm Forde, I shall not interfere. He is a very good fellow, and he has some private means, sufficient at any rate for the maintenance of a wife—what more could I want?”

“And you would sacrifice such a girl as Elizabeth to a Scotch curate,” said Mrs. Chevenix with the calmness of despair. “I always thought that you were the most short-sighted of mortals; but I did not believe you capable of such egregious folly as this. That girl might be a duchess.”

“Find me a duke, my dear Maria, and I will not object to him for my son-in-law.”

Mrs. Chevenix sighed, and shook her head with a despondent air; and Mr. Luttrell strolled out to the orchard, leaving her to bewail his folly in a confidential converse with Diana, who in a manner represented the worldly wisdom of the family.

“I wouldn’t make such a fuss about Lizzie, if I were you, auntie,” that young lady remarked somewhat coolly. “I never knew a girl about whom her people made too much fuss, setting her up as a beauty, and so on, do anything wonderful in the way of marriage.”

Like the eyes of the lynx, in his matchless strength of vision, were the eyes of aunt Chevenix for any sentimental converse between Elizabeth and Mr. Forde. It tortured her to know that they must needs have many opportunities of meeting outside the range of that keen vision—chance encounters in the cottages of the poor, or in the obscure lanes and alleys that fringed the chief street of Hawleigh. Vainly had she endeavoured to cajole her niece into the abandonment of those duties she had newly resumed. All her arguments, her flatteries, her ridicule, her little offerings of ribbons and laces and small trinketry, were wasted. After that visit of Malcolm Forde’s the girl was constant to her work.

“It is such a happiness to feel that I can be of some use in the world, auntie,” she said, unconsciously repeating Mr. Forde’s very words; “and if you had seen how pleased those poor souls were to see me amongst them again, you would hardly wonder at my liking the work.”

"A tribe of sycophants!" exclaimed Mrs. Chevenix contemptuously. "I should like to know what value they'd attach to your visits, or how much civility they'd show you, if there were not tea and sugar, and coals and blankets in the background. And I should like to know how long you'd stick to your work if Mr. Forde had left Hawleigh?"

Elizabeth flamed crimson at this accusation, but was not of a temper to be silenced by a hundred Chevenixes.

"Perhaps I might not like the work without his approval," she said defiantly; "but I hope I should go on with it all the same. I am not at all afraid to confess that his influence first set me thinking; that it was to please him I first tried to be good."

"I am not an ultra-religious person, Elizabeth; but I should call that setting the creature above the Creator," said Mrs. Chevenix severely. To which Lizzie muttered something that sounded like "Bosh."

"What else is there for me to do, I should like to know," the girl demanded contemptuously, after an interval of silence, Mrs. Chevenix having retired within herself in a dignified sulkiness. "Is there any amusement, or any excitement, or any distraction in our life in this place to hinder my devoting myself to these people?"

This speech was somewhat reassuring to Mrs. Chevenix: she inferred therefrom that if Elizabeth had had anything more agreeable to do, she would not have become a district-visitor.

"You have a fine voice, which you might cultivate to your future profit," she said; "a girl who sings really well is likely to make a great success in society."

"I understand. One gets asked out to entertain other people's friends; and one is not paid like a professional singer. I like music well enough, aunt; but you can't imagine I could spend half my existence in shrieking solfeggi, even if papa would tolerate the noise. I am sure, what with one another of us, the piano is jingling and clattering all day, as it is. Papa and the servants must execrate the sound of it: Blanche, with her *études de vélocité*, and Di with her everlasting fugues and sonatas—it's something abominable."

"You might have a piano in your tower bedroom, my dear. I wouldn't mind making you a present of a cottage."

"Thanks, auntie. Let it be a real cottage, then, instead of a cottage piano—against I set up that love-in-a-cottage you seem so much afraid of."

"Upon my word, Elizabeth, I can never make you out," said Mrs. Chevenix, plaintively. "Sometimes I think you are a thoroughly sensible girl, and at other times you really appear capable of any absurdity."

“Don’t be frightened, auntie. It rather amuses me to see your awe-stricken look when I say anything particularly wild. But you need have no misgivings about me. I am worldly-minded to the tips of my nails, as the French say; and I am perfectly aware that I am rather good-looking, and ought to make an advantageous marriage; only the eligible suitor is a long time appearing. Perhaps I shall meet him next spring in Eaton-place. As to Mr. Forde, he is quite out of the question. I know all about his past life, and know that he is a confirmed bachelor.”

“Your confirmed bachelors are a very dangerous race, Elizabeth,” said Mrs. Chevenix sententiously, “They contrive to throw families off their guard by their false pretences, and generally end by marrying a beauty or an heiress. But I trust you have too much common sense to take up with a man who can barely afford to keep you.”

By such small doses of worldly-wise counsel did Mrs. Chevenix strive to fortify her niece against the peril of Malcolm Forde’s influence. Her sharp eye had discovered something more than common kindness in the Curate’s bearing towards Elizabeth—something more than a mere spirit of contradiction in the girl’s liking for him. But there was time enough yet, she told herself; and the tender sprout of passion might, by a little judicious management, be nipped in the bud. She would not even wait for the coming spring, she thought; but would carry off Elizabeth with her when she went back to town a little before Christmas. She had intended to spend that social season in a hospitable Wiltshire manor-house; but that visit might be deferred. Anything was better than to leave her niece exposed to the perilous influence of Malcolm Forde.

Again and again had she made a mental review of the tritons in the matrimonial market; or rather, of those special tritons who might be brought within the narrow waters of her own drawing-room, or could be encountered at will in that wider sea of society to which she had free ingress. There was Sir Rockingham Pendarvis, the rich Cornish baronet, whom it had been her privilege to meet at the dinner parties of her own particular set, and who might be fairly counted upon for daily tea-drinking and occasional snug little dinners. There was Mr. Maltby, the great distiller, who had lately inherited a business popularly estimated at a hundred thousand a year. There was Mr. Miguel Zamires, the financier, with a lion’s share in the public funds of various nations, aquiline-nosed and olive-skinned, speaking a peculiar Spanish-English with a somewhat guttural accent. These three were the mightier argosies that sailed upon society’s smooth ocean; but there were numerous

craft of smaller tonnage whereof Mrs. Chevenix kept a record, and any one of which would be a prize worth boarding.

Inscrutable are the decrees of the gods. While this diplomatic matron was weaving her web for the next London season—even planning her little dinners, reckoning the expenses of the campaign, resolving to do things with a somewhat lavish hand—Fate brought a nobler prize than any she had dared to dream of winning, and landed it, without effort of her own, at her feet.

CHAPTER VIII.

“He never saw, never before to-day,
What was able to take his breath away,
A face to lose youth for, to occupy age
With the dream of, meet death with—”

It was early in November, and Mrs. Chevenix had been at the Vicarage a month—a month of inexorable dulness, faintly relieved by a couple of provincial dinner-parties, at which the Hawleigh pastor assembled round his well-furnished board a choice selection of what were called the best people in the neighbourhood. But the best people seemed somewhat dismal company to Mrs. Chevenix, who cared for no society that lacked the real London flavour—the bouquet of Hyde-park and the Clubs. She was beginning to pine for the racier talk of her own peculiar set, for the small luxuries of her own establishment, when an event occurred which, in a moment, transformed Hawleigh, and rendered it just the most delightful spot upon this lower sphere.

She had gone to church with her nieces on Sunday morning in by no means a pleasant humour, captiously disposed rather, and inclined to hold forth about their papa's peculiarities and their own shortcomings in a strain which Elizabeth openly resented, and the other girls inwardly rebelled against.

“If I had been as cross as aunt Chevenix is this morning in my nursery days, I should have been told that I had got up on the wrong side of my bed,” said Blanche, walking with Diana in the rear of the matron. “I suppose it wouldn't do for us mildly to suggest to auntie that she must have got up on the wrong side of her bed this morning. It might seem out of keeping.”

“I wonder you stop with us if our society is so very unpleasant, aunt,” said Elizabeth boldly.

“You ungrateful girl! You ought to know that I am staying in this relaxing climate, at the hazard of my own

health, simply in order to interpose my influence between you and destruction."

Elizabeth greeted this reproach with a scornful laugh, even at the gate of the churchyard.

"You foolish auntie! you surely don't suppose that your presence herewould prevent my doing any thing I wished to do; that the mere dead-weight of your worldly wisdom would quench the fire of my impulses?" she said.

They were within the church-porch before aunt Chevenix could reply. She sailed up the central aisle with all her plain sails spread, and took the most comfortable seat in the vicarage pew, without bestowing so much as a glance upon the herd of nobodies who worshipped their Creator in that remote temple, and whose bonnets and choice of colours in general she protested was barbarous enough to set her teeth on edge.

She sat with half-closed eyelids and a languid air during the earlier portion of the service, and kept her seat throughout the reading of the psalms; but in the middle of the hymn that was sung before the litany, Elizabeth was surprised by a complete change in her aunt's manner. The cold blue eyes opened to their widest extent, while their gaze grew fixed in an eager stare. The carefully-finished eyebrows were raised; the corners of the mouth, which feature had previously been distinguished by a somewhat sour expression, relaxed into a faint smile; the whole physiognomy indicated at once pleasure and surprise. The look was so marked that Elizabeth's eyes involuntarily followed the direction of her aunt's transfixed gaze.

Her wondering glance that way did not show her anything very strange—only old Lady Pauly, a somewhat faded dame, in a lavender satin bonnet, a black velvet cloak, and rare old mechlin collar, all of ancient fashion. In precisely such garments could Elizabeth remember Lady Pauly from the days of her childhood. She lived in a huge and dismal architectural pile about seven miles from Hawleigh, saw very little society, kept no state, and gave but sparingly to the poor. She had an only son, for whom she was said to be hoarding her money, and very large were the figures by which the gossips of Hawleigh computed her hoards.

Of young Lord Pauly (Viscount Pauly in the peerage of England, and Baron Ouchterlochy in Ireland), her only son, Hawleigh had of late years seen so little that his face and figure were known to but few among the denizens of that town. But various were the rumours of that young man's manners and movements in the more brilliant scenes which he affected. His tastes were of the turf, turf; he was said to have a tan gallop of his own at Newmarket, and a stable in Yorkshire; and, while some authorities declared that he was making ducks and drakes

of all the wealth of past generations of Paulyns—all more or less distinguished by a miserly turn of mind, and dating their nobility from the time of Charles the Second, who, by way of recompense for divers accommodations of a financial character, created one Jasper Paulyn, merchant and money-lender, Viscount Paulyn, of Ashcombe—other wiseacres affirmed that he had doubled his fortune by lucky transactions on the turf—betting against his own horses, and various strokes of genius of a like calibre.

On whichever side the truth may have lain, and whatever hazard there might be of future ruin, Lord Paulyn was, at this present date, accounted one of the richest bachelors in England. Mrs. Chevenix had met him on rare and happy occasions, to be remembered and boasted of long afterwards, and had gazed upon him with the eyes of worship. He had even been civil to her in his easy off-hand way, and had spoken of her to a common acquaintance as a “decent old party;” “held her head uncommon high, though, and looked as if she’d been driven with a bearing-rein.”

The Luttrells were on sufficiently friendly terms with the Viscount’s mother, although the Viscount himself was a stranger to them. About twice a year Lady Paulyn called at the Vicarage, and about twice a year Mr. Luttrell and a brace of his daughters made a ceremonial visit to Ashcombe, the seat of the Paulyns. At school-treats and other charity festivals, on warm summer afternoons, the lavender satin bonnet would sometimes make its appearance, nodding to the commonalty with benignant condescension; while plethoric farmers of a radical turn opined that “it ’ud be a deal better if the old gal ’ud put her name down for a fi’pun note a little oftener, instid o’ waggling of her blessed old bonnet like a Chinee mandarin.”

Whatever five-pound notes Lady Paulyn did bestow upon the deserving or undeserving indigent were dealt out by the agency of Mr. Luttrell, or Mr. Chapman, the incumbent of an ancient little church in the ancient village of Ashcombe. No necessitous wanderers were allowed to prowl about the courtyards, or loiter at the back doors of Ashcombe Manor. No dole of milk, or bread, or wine, or beer, or broken victuals, was ever dispensed in the Ashcombe kitchen. Lady Paulyn sold the produce of her dairy and poultry-yard, her garden stuffs and venison. Orchard-houses and vineries she had none, holding the cultivation of fruit under glass to be a new-fangled mode of wasting money, or she would assuredly have sold her grapes and pines and peaches. But she had acres of apple-orchard, whose produce she supplied to a cider manufacturer at Hawleigh, retaining only a certain number of bushels of the least saleable apples for the concoction of a peculiarly thin and acid liquor which she drank herself and gave to her servants and dependents.

"If it is good enough for me, my dear, it ought to be good enough for them," she told her companion and poor relation, Miss Hilda Disney, when the voice of revolt was faintly heard from the servants' hall.

The lavender satin bonnet was not alone in the great square pew. Miss Disney was seated opposite her benefactress—a fair quiet-looking young woman, with long flaxen ringlets, and a curious stillness about her face and manner at all times; an air of supreme repose, which seemed to have grown up out of the solitude and silence of her joyless life until it had become an attribute of her own nature. She had refined and delicate features, a faultless complexion of the blended rose-and-lily order, large soft blue eyes, and lacked only life and expression to be almost beautiful. Wanting these, she was, in the words of Elizabeth Luttrell, a very pretty picture of a pink-and-white woman.

"There is not a factory girl in Hawleigh so much to be pitied as Miss Disney," said Elizabeth, when she discovered this young lady's character and surroundings. "How much better to be waxwork altogether than be only half alive like that! But there is one advantage in having that kind of semi-sentient nature. I don't believe Hilda Disney feels anything—either the gloom of that dismal old house, or the tyranny of that awful old woman. I don't suppose she would mind very much if Lady Paulyn were to stick pins in her, as the witches used to stick them in *their* wax figures; or perhaps she might feel pins, though she is impervious to nagging."

To-day Elizabeth looked from the Viscountess to Miss Disney, and wondered, with some touch of feminine compassion, if she would ever have a new bonnet, or go on wearing the same head-gear of black lace and violets to her dying day. But there was a third person in the Paulyn pew, and it was upon the countenance of this last individual that the distented eyeballs of Mrs. Chevenix gazed with that gaze of wonderment and delight.

This third person was a stranger to the sight of most people in Hawleigh. He was a man of about six-and-twenty, broad shouldered and strongly built, but not above the middle height, with a face that was singularly handsome, after a purely animal type of beauty—a low forehead; a short straight nose, moulded rather than chiselled; full lips, shaded by a thick brown moustache; a square jaw, a trifle too heavy for the rest of the face; a powerful column-like throat, fully exposed by the low-cut collar, and narrow strip of cravat; short-cut hair of reddish brown; and large bright eyes of the same hue, a reddish hazel—eyes that had never been dimmed by thought or study, but had something of the sailor's hawk-like far-off vision. It was the face and figure of a Greek athlete, the winner of the

wild olive-crown, in the days when strength was accounted beauty.

"Do you know who that is in the pew by the altar?" whispered Mrs. Chevenix, under cover of the tall green-baize-lined pew, when they knelt down for the litany.

"Don't know, I'm sure," replied Elizabeth indifferently; "I suppose it's a stranger that they've put in the Ashcombe pew."

"That young man is Lord Paulyn, one of the richest men in London," said Mrs. Chevenix, in an awe-stricken whisper.

"O," said Elizabeth settling down to the responses, and not peculiarly impressed by this announcement.

Sorely mechanical was Mrs. Chevenix's share in the service after this discovery. Her lips murmured the responses, with undeviating correctness. She escaped every pitfall which our form of prayer offers for the unwary, and came up to time at every point; but her mind was busy with curious thoughts about Lord Paulyn, and very little of the Vicar's good old English sermon—a judicious solution of Tillotson, South, and Venn—found its way to her comprehension.

She contrived to steer her way down the aisle so as to emerge from the porch with her elbow against the elbow of Lord Paulyn, and then came radiant smiles of recognition, and intense astonishment at this unexpected meeting.

"There's nothing very remarkable in it," said the Viscount, while the Luttrell girls were shaking hands with Lady Paulyn and Miss Disney; "my mother lives down here you know, and I generally come for a week or so in the huntin' season. Going to church is rather out of my line, I admit; but I sometimes do it here to gratify the mater. Any of your people live down here, Mrs. Chevenix?"

"Yes; I am staying with my brother, the Vicar."

"Bless my soul! old Luttrell your brother, is he? I had no idea of that. Those girls belong to you, I suppose? rather nice girls—talking to my mother."

"Those young ladies are my nieces."

"Uncommonly handsome girl, that tall one. We're rather noted for that sort of thing in the west; pilchards, clotted cream, and fine women, are our staple. Pray introduce me to your nieces, Mrs. Chevenix. Do they hunt?"

Mrs. Chevenix shook her head despondently.

"Elizabeth has all the ambition for that kind of thing," she said, "but not the opportunity. My brother has four daughters, and the Church is not a Golconda."

"That's a pity," said the Viscount, staring at Elizabeth, who was talking to Miss Disney on the opposite side of the path, along which the congregation was slowly moving, with a good deal of nodding and beckoning and friendly salutation; "that tall

girl looks as if she would be straightish rider. I could give her a good mount, if her father would let her hunt."

"That would be quite out of the question," said Mrs. Chevenix; "my brother has such strict notions;" a remark which might have sounded somewhat curious to the easy-going pastor himself; but Mrs. Chevenix had certain cards to play, and knew pretty well how to play them.

"Hump, I suppose so; a parson and all that kind of thing. Which is Elizabeth? The tall one?"

"Yes, Elizabeth is the tallest of the four."

"She's an uncommonly handsome girl."

"She is generally considered so."

"Egad, so she ought to be. There wasn't a girl to compare with her in this year's betting. Introduce me, please, Mrs. Chevenix."

The matron hesitated, as if this demand were hardly agreeable to her. "I think the introduction would come better from Lady Paulyn," she said, "as my nieces appear to be on friendly terms with her."

"O, very well; my mother can present me—it comes to the same thing. Don't you know her?"

Mrs. Chevenix shook her head with a gentle melancholy.

"My nieces have not taken the trouble to make us acquainted," she said; "I was not even aware that Lady Paulyn had a seat in this part of the country."

She might have added, that she was not even aware of Lady Paulyn's existence until this morning. She had supposed the Viscount to be in the independent position of an orphan.

"O, yes, we've a place down here, and a precious ugly one, but my mother likes it; doesn't cost much to keep up, though it's big enough for a barrack. I say, mother," crossing the pathway, which was now nearly clear, "this is Mrs. Chevenix, Mr. Luttrell's sister, who is dying to know you."

Mrs. Chevenix made a sweeping curtsey, as if she had some idea of subsiding into unknown depths below the timeworn tombstones that paved the pathway. The lavender bonnet gave a little friendly nod, and the Viscountess extended a paw in a crumpled black kid glove.

"And now, mother, you may present me to these young 'adies," said the Viscount.

The presentation was made, but hardly with that air of cordiality which it was Lady Paulyn's habit to employ as a set-off against the closeness of her financial operations and the inhospitality of her gaunt old mansion. Mrs. Chevenix detected a lurking reluctance in the dowager's manner of making her son known to the Luttrell girls.

The Vicar came out of the porch while this ceremony was

being performed, with Malcolm Forde by his side. There were more greetings, and Elizabeth had time to shake hands with her father's curate, although Lord Paulyn was in the very utterance of some peculiarly original remark about the general dulness of Hawleigh. Mr. Forde had been very kind to her since her return to the path he had chalked out for her—deferential even in his manner, as if she had become at once the object of his gratitude and respect. But he had no opportunity of saying much to Elizabeth just now, though she had turned at once to greet him, and had forgotten to respond to Lord Paulyn's remark about Hawleigh; for Gertrude plunged immediately into the usual parish talk, and held forth upon the blessed fruits of her late labours as manifest in the appearance of a certain Job Smithers in the free seats: "A man who was almost an infidel, dear Mr. Forde, and used to take his children's Sunday-frocks to the pawnbroker's every Thursday or Friday, in order to obtain drink. But I am thankful to say I persuaded him to take the pledge, and I cherish hopes of his complete reformation."

"Rather given to pledges, that fellow, I should think, Miss Luttrell," said the Viscount, in an irreverent spirit. "I can't conceive why young ladies in the country plague themselves with useless attempts at reforming such fellows. I don't believe there's a ha'porth of good done by it. You may keep a man sober for a week, but he'll break out and drink double as much for the next fortnight. You might as well try to stop a man from having scarlet fever when the poison's in his blood. I had a trainer, now, in the north, as clever a fellow as ever breathed. I think if you'd given him a clothes-horse to train, he'd have made it win a cup before he'd done with it. But there was no keeping him away from the bottle. I tried everything; talked to him like a father, supplied him with *château Lafitte*, to try and get him off brandy; but it was no use, and the stupid beggar had one attack of *D. T.* after another, till he went off his head altogether, and had to be locked up."

This improving anecdote Lord Paulyn apparently related for the edification of Elizabeth; since, although he began by addressing Gertrude, it was on the younger sister his gaze was fixed, as he dwelt plaintively on the hapless doom of his trainer.

"Won't you come to the Vicarage for luncheon, Lady Paulyn?" asked Mr. Luttrell, who had the old-fashioned eager country-squireish hospitality, and who saw that the Viscount hardly seemed inclined to move from his stand upon a crumbling old tombstone which recorded the decease of "Josiah Judd, of this parish; also of Amelia Judd, wife of the above; and of Hannah, infant daughter of the above," and so on, through a perplexing string of departed Judds, all of this parish; a fact

dwelt upon with as much insistence as if to be "of this parish" were an earthly distinction that ought to prove a passport to eternal felicity.

"You're very kind," said the dowager graciously, "and your luncheons are always excellent; but I shouldn't like to have the horses out so late on a Sunday, and Parker, my coachman, is a Primitive Methodist, and makes a great point of attending his own chapel once every Sunday. I like to defer to my servants' prejudices in these small matters."

"O Lady Paulyn, I hope you don't call salvation a small matter!" ejaculated Gertrude, who would have lectured an archbishop.

"Hang Parker's prejudices!" cried Lord Paulyn; "and as to those two old screws of yours in the chariot, I don't believe anything could hurt them. They ought to have been sent to a knacker's yard five years ago. I always call that wall-eyed gray the Ancient Mariner. He holds me with his glassy eye. We'll come to the Vicarage, by all means, Mr. Luttrell."

The dowager gave way at once. She was much too wise to make any attempt at dragooning this only son, for whose enrichment she had pinched and scraped and hoarded until pinching and scraping and hoarding had become the habit of her mind. Too well did she know that Reginald Paulyn was a young man who would go his own way; that her small economies, her domestic cheese-paring, and flint-skinning were as so many drops of water as compared with the vast ocean of his expenditure. Yet she went on economising with ineffable patience, and thought no day ill-spent in which she had saved a shilling between sunrise and sunset.

They all moved away in the direction of the Vicarage, which, unlike the usual run of vicarages, was somewhat remote from the church.

There was a walk of about a quarter of a mile between St. Clement's, which stood just within the West Bar, a gray old archway at the end of the high-street, and the abode of the Luttrells. The Vicar offered his arm to the dowager.

"You'll come with us, of course, Forde," he said, in his friendly way, looking round at his curate, and the curate did not refuse that offer of hospitality.

Sunday luncheon at Hawleigh Vicarage was a famous institution. Mr. Luttrell, as a rule, abjured that mid-day meal, pronouncing it, in the words of some famous epicure, "an insult to a man's breakfast, and an injury to his dinner." But on Sunday the pastor sacrificed himself to the convenience of his household, and went without his seven-o'clock dinner, in order that his cook might exhibit her best bonnet in the afternoon and evening at his two churches. There was no roasting

or boiling in the vicarage kitchen on that holy day, only a gentle simmering of curries and fricassees, prepared overnight; nor was there any regular dinner, but by way of substitute therefor, a high tea at eight o'clock, a pleasant easy-going banquet, which had been much affected by former curates. But woe be to the household if the two-o'clock luncheon were not a select and savoury repast! and Miss Luttrell and the cook held solemn consultation every Saturday morning in order to secure this result.

So the Vicar enjoyed himself every Sunday with his friends round him, and bemoaned himself every Monday on the subject of that untimely meal, declaring that he had thrown his whole internal machinery out of gear for the accommodation of his servants.

To-day the luncheon seemed a peculiar success. Lady Paulyn, who was somewhat a stranger to the good things of this life, did ample justice to the viands, devoured curried chicken with the gusto of an Anglo-Indian, called the parlour-maid back to her for a second supply of oyster vol-au-vent, and wound-up with cold sirloin and winter salad, in a manner that was eminently suggestive of indigestion. Lord Paulyn had the modern appetite, which is of the weakest, trifled with a morsel of curry, drank a good deal of seltzer-and-brandy, and enjoyed himself amazingly after his manner, entertaining Elizabeth, by whose side he had contrived to be seated, with the history of his Yorkshire stable, and confiding to her his lofty hopes for the coming year.

She was not particularly interested in this agreeable discourse; but she could see, just as plainly as Mrs. Chevenix saw, that the Viscount was impressed by her beauty, and it was not unpleasant to her to have made such an impression upon that patrician mind, even if it were merely the affair of an hour. Nor was she unconscious of a certain steady watchfulness in the dark deep-set eyes of Malcolm Forde, who sat opposite to her, and was singularly inattentive to the remarks of his next neighbour, Gertrude.

"I don't suppose his perfect woman ever had the opportunity of flirting with a viscount," thought Elizabeth, "or that she would have done such a thing if she had. I like to horrify him with an occasional glimpse of those depths of iniquity to which I can descend. If he cared for me a little, now, and there were any chance of making him jealous, the pleasure would be ever so much keener; but that is out of the question."

So the reformed Elizabeth, the Christian pastor's daughter, who visited the poor, and comforted the afflicted, and supported the heads of sick children on her bosom, and read the gospel to the ignorant, and did in some vague undeterminate manner

struggle towards the higher, purer life, vanished altogether, giving place to a young person who improved her opportunity with the Viscount as dexterously as if she had been bred up at the knees of aunt Chevenix, and had never known any loftier philosophy than that which dropped from those worldly lips. Malcolm Forde looked on, and shuddered. "And for such a woman I had almost been false to the memory of Alice Fraser!"

It must not be supposed that Elizabeth's iniquity was of an outrageous nature. She was only listening with an air of profound interest to Lord Paulyn's stable-talk, even trying to comprehend the glory of possessing a horse entered for next year's Derby, about which fifteen to two had been freely taken at Manchester during the autumn, and who was likely to advance in the betting after Christmas. She was only smiling radiantly upon a young man she had never seen until that morning—only receiving the homage of admiring eyes with a gracious air of unconsciousness; like some splendid flower which does not shrink or droop under the full blaze of a meridian sun, but rather basks and brightens beneath the glory of the sun-god.

But to the eyes of the man who watched her with an interest he would have hardly cared to confess to himself, this conduct seemed very black indeed. He groaned inwardly over the defection of this fair young soul, which not a little while ago he had deemed regenerate.

"She is not worth the anxiety I feel about her," he said to himself: "Gertrude is a hundred times her superior, really earnest, really good, not a creature of whim and impulse, drifted about by every wind that blows. And yet I cannot feel the same interest in her."

And then he began to wonder if there were indeed something inherently interesting in sin, and if the repentant sinner must needs always have the advantage of the just person. It seemed almost a hard saying to him, that touching sentence of the gospel of hope, which reserves its highest promises for the wilful, passionate soul that has chosen its own road in life and has only been brought home broken, and soiled, and tarnished at the last.

Gertrude was virtuous, but not interesting. Vainly did Malcolm Forde endeavour to apply his ear to her discourse. His attention was distracted, in spite of himself, by that animated talk upon the other side of the wide oval table; his eyes wandered now to the handsome, sensual face of the Viscount, now to Elizabeth's lively countenance, which expressed no weariness of that miserable horsey talk. Nor was Mr. Forde the only person present who took note of that animated conversation.

From her place at the farther end of the table, Miss Disney's

calm blue eyes wandered ever and anon towards her kinsman and Elizabeth, hardly with any show of interest or concern, but with a coldly curious air, as if she wondered at Lord Pauly's vivacity, as an unwonted exhibition on his part. She was very quiet, spoke little, and only replied in the briefest sentences to any remark made by Mr. Luttrell, next to whom she was seated. She ate hardly anything, rarely smiled, and appeared to take very little more interest in the life about and around her than if she had been, indeed, a waxen image, impervious to pain or pleasure.

Luncheon came to an end at last, after being drawn out to a point that seemed intolerable to the curate; St. Mary's bells sounded in the distance, from the eastern end of the large straggling town. There was only a short afternoon service; the litany and a catechising of the children, which Mr. Luttrell himself rarely attended, deeming that perambulatory examination of small scholars, the hearing of collect, epistle, and gospel, stumbled through with more or less blundering by monotonous treble voices, a task peculiarly adapted to the curate mind. So, as soon as grace had been said, Mr. Forde rose quietly, shook hands with Gertrude, and slipped away, not unseen by Elizabeth. "There's a good deal of that fellow for a curate," said Lord Pauly, casting a lazy glance at the retreating figure; "he ought to have been a lifeguardsman."

"Mr. Forde has been in the army," Elizabeth answered coldly.

"I thought as much, and in a cavalry regiment, of course. He has the 'long sword, saddle, bridle' walk. What made him take to the Church? The army's bad enough—stiff examinations, bad pay, hard work; but it must be better than the Church. What made him change his profession?"

"Mr. Forde has not taken the trouble to acquaint the world with his motives," said Elizabeth with increasing coldness.

Lord Pauly looked at her curiously. She seemed somewhat sensitive upon the subject of this tall curate. Was there anything between them, he wondered; a flirtation, an engagement even perhaps. He had caught the curate's glance wandering her way several times during the banquet.

"Egad, the fellow has good taste," thought Lord Pauly. "She's the prettiest woman I ever saw, bar none, and is no end too good for a snuffling parson. I'll make that old Chevenix tell me all about it presently."

"That old Chevenix" had been trying to make her way with the dowager during the lengthy meal, entertaining her with little scraps of town-talk and small lady-like scandal; not virulent vulgar slander, but good-natured genial kind of gossip, touching lightly upon the failings and errors of one's acquaintance, deploring their little infirmities and mistaken courses with

a friendly compassionate spirit, essentially Christian. But she was mortified to discover that her small efforts to amuse were futile. The dowager would not acknowledge acquaintance with one of the people Mrs. Chevenix talked about, or the faintest interest in those public characters, the shining lights of the great world, about whose private life every well-regulated British mind is supposed to be curious.

"I don't know her," said this impracticable old woman; "I never met him; I'm not acquainted with 'em;" until the soul of the Chevenix sank within her, for she was ardently desirous of establishing friendly relations with this perverse dowager.

"I'm a Devonshire woman, and I only know Devonshire people," said the dowager, ruthlessly cutting short one of the choicest stories that had been current in the last London season.

"Then you must know the Trepethericks!" exclaimed Mrs. Chevenix, in her gushing way; "dear Lady Trepetherick is a sweet woman, and one of my best friends; and Sir Charles, what a thorough independent-minded Englishman!"

"I never heard of 'em," replied the dowager bluntly; and Mrs. Chevenix was hardly sorry when the conclusion of the meal brought her hopeless endeavours to a close.

"I can't keep those horses waiting any longer," said this ungrateful old woman, as she rose from the table, after having eaten to repletion. "Will you tell them to bring my carriage directly, Reginald?"

"Nonsense, mother; the horses are in the stable, and much better off than they'd be at Ashcombe, I dare say," answered the Viscount: "I'm not coming home for an hour. Miss Luttrell is going to show me the garden, and an ancient turret that was part of Hawleigh Castle."

"Miss Luttrell is at the other end of the room," said the dowager grimly, perceiving that her son's gaze was rooted to Elizabeth.

"Miss Elizabeth Luttrell, then," said that young man; "you'll show me the garden, won't you?"

"There's not much worth your looking at," answered Elizabeth carelessly.

"O, yes, there is: a man would travel a long way to see as much," cried the Viscount significantly; and then thinking that his admiration had been somewhat too direct, he went on—"a mediæval tower, you know, and all that kind of thing. But you needn't wait for me, mother, if you're really anxious to get home. I'll find my way back to Ashcombe somehow."

"What, walk seven miles between this and dinner-time!" exclaimed the dowager.

"There are circumstances under which a man might do as

much," answered the Viscount; "and the Ashcombe dinners are not banquets which I hold in extreme reverence."

Lady Paulyn sighed despondently. It was a hard thing to have toiled for such an ingrate.

"I'll wait for you, Reginald," she said with a resigned air. "Parker must lose his afternoon's service for once in a way. I daresay he'll give me warning to-morrow morning."

So Lord Paulyn went into the garden with Elizabeth, longing sorely for the solacement of a cigar, even in that agreeable society. He made the circuit of grounds in which there was very little to see in the month of November; went into the orchard, which he pronounced "rather a jolly little place," and contemplated the landscape to be seen therefrom; examined the moss-grown tower which flanked the low white house, and uttered divers critical remarks which did not show him to be a profound student of archæology.

"Nice old place for a smoking crib," he said: "what do you use it for? lumber-room, or coal or wine cellar—eh?"

"My sister Blanche and I sleep in it," replied Elizabeth, laughing: "I wouldn't change my tower-room for any other in the house."

"Ah, but you'll change it, you know, one of these days when you have a house of your own; and such a girl as you must look forward to something better than this old Vicarage."

"I am quite satisfied with surroundings that are good enough for the rest of my family," said Elizabeth with her proudest air; "and I have never looked forward to anything of the kind."

"O, but, come now, really, you know," remonstrated the Viscount, "a girl like you can't mean to be buried alive for ever. You ought to see the world—Ascot, you know, and Goodwood, and the Oxford and Cambridge boat-race, and the pigeon-shooting at Hurlingham. You can't intend to mope in this dreary old place all your life. I don't mean to say anything against your father's house, and I'm sure he gave us an uncommonly good luncheon; but this kind of life is not up to *your* mark, you know."

Here was a second counsellor suggesting that the life Elizabeth Luttrell lived was not good enough for her, urging upon her the duty of rising above her surroundings; but in a somewhat different spirit from that other adviser, whom she had of late pretended to obey. And this foolish impressionable soul was but too ready to follow the new guide, too ready to admit that it was a hard thing to be fettered to the narrow life of a country parsonage, to be cut off for ever from that brighter world of Ascot and Goodwood. It was not that she considered the Viscount at all a superior person. She was quite able to perceive that this heir of all the ages and all the Paulyns was

made of very vulgar clay; but she knew that he was a power in that unknown world whose pleasures she had sometimes longed for with an intense longing, and it was not unpleasant to hear from so great an authority that she was worthy to shine there.

She was not alone with the Viscount in the garden even for half an hour. The proprieties must be observed in Devonshire as well as in Belgravia. Mrs. Chevenix was taking a constitutional with Diana close at hand, while Elizabeth and the lordling were strolling along the garden walks, and making the circuit of the orchard. The dowager had also hobbled out by this time, with Mr. Luttrell in attendance upon her, not too well pleased at being cut off from the sweets of his afternoon nap.

"I might as well be catechising the children as doing this," he thought dolefully. But there is an end of all social self-sacrifice, and the lumbering old yellow chariot came grinding over the carriage drive at last, whereupon Lady Paulyn declared that she *must* go.

"I am sure we have had a vastly agreeable visit," she said, wagging her ancient head graciously, and softening at her departure with a grateful recollection of that toothsome vol-au-vent; "you must all come and dine with me one of these days." This was a vague kind of invitation, which the Luttrells had heard before; a shadowy coin, wherewith the dowager paid off small obligations.

"Yes, mother," cried Lord Paulyn eagerly; "you'd better ask Mr. Luttrell and the young ladies, and—er—Mrs. Chevenix to dine with you some day next week, while I'm at Ashcombe, you know. It's deuced dull there unless we're lucky enough to get nice people. What day will suit you, eh, Mr. Luttrell?"

"Hilda shall write Miss Luttrell a little note," said the dowager graciously; "Hilda writes all my little notes."

"Notes be hanged!" exclaimed Lord Paulyn; "why not settle it now? You are not going to give a party, you know; you never do. Come, Luttrell, name your day for bringing over the young ladies. There'll be nobody to meet you, unless it's Chapman, the Ashcombe parson, a very good fellow, and an uncommonly straight rider. Will Thursday suit you? that's an off-day with me. You might come over to luncheon, and do the family pictures, if you care about that dingy school of art;—couldn't you?" this to Elizabeth.

"The Miss Luttrells have seen our picture-gallery, Reginald," said the dowager.

"Well, never mind, they can see it again. I know those old portraits—a collection of ancient mugs—are not much worth looking at; but in the country, you know, one must do something; it's a good way of getting through a winter's afternoon.

And I can teach you bézique, if you don't know it"—this to the damsels generally, but with a special glance at Elizabeth. "We'll say Thursday then, at two o'clock; and mind, we shall expect you all, shan't we, mother?"

He hoisted her into the chariot before she could gainsay him, and in a manner extinguished her and any objection she might have been disposed to offer.

"What a charming young man!" exclaimed Mrs. Chevenix, as the chariot rumbled away, after very cordial adieux from the Viscount, and a somewhat cold leave-taking from Hilda Disney. "So frank, so easy, so unassuming, so utterly unconscious of his position; one would never discover from his manner that he was one of the richest noblemen in England, and that the Paulyns are as old a family as the Percys."

"I don't see any special merit in that," said Mr. Luttrell, laughing; "a man can hardly go about the world labelled with the amount of his income, or wear his genealogical tree embroidered upon the back of his coat. And you're mistaken when you call the Paulyns a good old family. They were in trade as late as the reign of Charles the Second, and owe their title to the King's necessities. The young fellow is well enough, however, and seems good-natured and friendly; but I cannot say that the manners of the present day impress me by their elegance or their polish, if I am to take Lord Paulyn as a fair sample of your modern fine gentleman."

"The fine gentleman is as extinct as the megatherium, Wilmot; he went out with high collars and black-satin stocks. The qualities we appreciate nowadays are ease and savoir-faire. If poor George the Fourth could come to life again, with his grand manner, what an absurd creature we should all think the first gentleman of Europe!"

"I am sorry for our modern taste, then, my dear," answered the Vicar; "but as Lord Paulyn seems inclined to be civil, I suppose we must make the best of him. I wish he'd spend more of his time down here, and keep up the old house as it ought to be kept, for the good of the neighbourhood."

"O you blind old mole!" thought Mrs. Chevenix, as Mr. Luttrell retired to his den; a little bit of a room at the end of the house, with a latticed window looking down upon the sloping orchard; a window that faced the western sun, and warmed the room pleasantly upon a winter afternoon. There was a tiny fireplace in a corner; a capacious arm-chair; a writing-table, at which the Vicar hammered out his weekly sermon when he treated his congregation to a new one; a battered old book-case, containing a few books of reference, and Mr. Luttrell's college classics, with the cribs that had assisted him therewith. Here he was wont to slumber peacefully on a Sabbath afternoon until

Blanche brought him a cup of strong tea, and told him it was time to think about evening service.

Mrs. Chevenix ensconced herself in her favourite chair by the drawing-room fire, with a banner-screen carefully adjusted for the protection of her complexion, and sat for a long time slowly fanning herself, and meditating on the events of the day. That Lord Paulyn was impressed by her niece's beauty—in modern phrasology, hard hit—the astute widow had no doubt; but on the other hand he might be a young man who was in the habit of being hard hit by every pretty girl he met, and the impression might result in nothing. Yet that invitation to Ashcombe, about which he had shown such eagerness, indicated something serious. It might be a question of time, perhaps. If the young man stayed long enough in the neighbourhood, there was no saying what brilliant result might come of the admiration which he had exhibited to-day with such a delightful candour.

“How very odd that you should never have seen Lord Paulyn before, Blanche!” said Mrs. Chevenix to her youngest niece, who was sitting on the hearth-rug making believe to read a volume of Sunday literature.

“It's not particularly odd, auntie, for he very seldom comes here; and when he does come—about once in two years perhaps—it's only for the hunting. I never saw him in church before to-day, that I can remember.”

“But it is still more strange that I should never have heard you speak of his mother.”

“O, she's a stingy old thing, and we don't any of us care for her. We only see her about twice a year, and there's no reason we should talk about her. She's a most uninteresting old party.”

“My dearest Blanche, ease of manner is one thing, and vulgarity is another; I wish you would bear in mind that distinction. Party, except in its legal or collective sense, is a word I abhor; and a girl of your age would do well to adopt a more respectful tone in speaking of your superiors in the social scale.”

“I really can't be respectful about old Lady Paulyn, aunt. We had a housemaid from Ashcombe; and, O, the stories she told me about that dreadful house! They'd make your hair stand on end. I wonder what they'll give us for dinner next Thursday. Barleybroth perhaps, and boiled leg of mutton.”

“Blanche, I beg that you will desist from such flippant chatter. Lady Paulyn may be eccentric, but she is a lady whose notice it is an honour to receive. Do you know how long Lord Paulyn usually stays at Ashcombe?”

“He doesn't usually stay there, aunt. He has been there once in two years, as far as I know; and has stayed for a fort-

night or three weeks. I've heard people say that he cares for nothing but horses, and that he spends his life in going from one race-meeting to another."

"A thorough Englishman's taste," said Mrs. Chevenix approvingly. If she had been told that he was an amateur house-breaker, or had a passion for garrotting, she would have hardly blamed his weakness. "But I have no doubt he will give up that sort of thing when he marries."

CHAPTER IX.

"The burden of sweet speeches. Nay, kneel down,
 Cover thy head, and weep; for verily
 These market-men that buy thy white and brown
 In the last days shall take no thought for thee.
 In the last days like earth thy face shall be,
 Yea, like sea-marsh made thick with brine and mire,
 Sad with sick leavings of the sterile sea
 This is the end of every man's desire."

THE Vicar had fully expected to receive one of Miss Disney's little notes postponing the dinner at Ashcombe, so foreign was it to the manners and customs of the dowager to extend so much hospitality to her neighbours; but instead of the little note of postponement there came a little note "to remind;" and, as Mr. Luttrell observed, with an air of resignation, there was nothing for it but to go.

Then came a grand consultation as to who should go. It was not to be supposed that Mr. Luttrell could enter society, even in the most friendly way, with five women in his wake. Gertrude at once announced her indifference to the entertainment. It was Thursday, and on that night there was an extra service and a sermon at St. Clement's. She would not lose Mr. Forde's sermon for the world.

"And I should think *you* would hardly miss that, Lizzie," she said, "since you have become so stanch a Forde-ite."

But on this Mrs. Chevenix protested vehemently that Elizabeth must go to Ashcombe. She had been especially mentioned by the Viscount. He was to teach her *bézique*.

"I know all about *bézique* already, and I hate it," Elizabeth answered coolly; "but I should like to see a dinner at Ashcombe. I want to see whether it will be all make-believe, like the Barmecide's feast, or whether there will really be some kind of food upon the table. My impression is, that the dinner will consist of a leg of mutton and an *epergne*."

It was decided therefore, after a little skirmishing between

the sisters, that Elizabeth and Diana should accompany Mr. Luttrell and Mrs. Chevenix to Ashcombe, and that Gertrude and Blanche should stay at home. The vicarage wagonette, which had a movable cover that transformed it into a species of genteel baker's cart, would hold four very comfortably. The Vicar could afford to absent himself for once in a way from the Thursday-evening service, which was an innovation of Mr. Forde's.

The appointed day was not altogether unpropitious, but was hardly inviting: a dull dry winter day, with a gray sunless sky and a north-east wind, which whistled shrilly among the leafless elms and beeches of the wide avenue in Ashcombe Park as the vicarage wagonette drove up to the house.

Ashcombe Park was a great tract of low-lying land, stretched at the feet of a rugged hill that rose abruptly from the very edge of the wide lawn on one side of the house, and overshadowed it with its gaunt outline like a couchant giant. The mansion itself was a triumph of that school of architecture in which the research of ugliness seems to have been the directing principle of the designer's mind. It was a huge red-and-yellow brick edifice of the Vanbrugh school, with a ponderous centre and more ponderous wings; long ranges of narrow windows unrelieved by a single ornament; broad flights of shallow stone steps on each side of the tall central door; a garden-door at the end of each wing; an inner quadrangle, embellished with a hideous equestrian statue of some distinguished Paulyn who had perished at Malplaquet: a house which, in better occupation and with lighter surroundings, might not have been without a certain old-fashioned dignity and charm of its own peculiar order, but which in the possession of Lady Paulyn wore an aspect of depressing gloom.

There were some darksome specimens of the conifer tribe in huge square wooden tubs upon the broad gravelled walk before the principal front; but there was no pretence of a flower-garden on any side of the mansion. Lady Paulyn abjured floriculture as a foolish waste of money. The geometrical flower-beds in the Dutch garden, that had once adorned the south wing, had been replaced by a flat expanse of turf, on which her ladyship's sheep ranged at their pleasure; the wide lawn before the grand saloon—a panelled chamber of fifty feet long, with musical instruments and emblems painted in medallions on the panels—was also a pasture for those useful animals, which sometimes gazed through the narrow panes of windows, with calm wondering eyes, while Lady Paulyn and Hilda sat at work within.

Lord Paulyn was pacing the walk by the conifers as the wagonette drove up, and flew to assist the vicarage man-of-all-work in his attendance upon the ladies.

"I'm so glad you've all come," he exclaimed, as he handed out Elizabeth, apparently unconscious of the absence of her two sisters. "Very good of your father to bring you to such a dismal hole. I sometimes wonder my mother and Hilda don't go to sleep for a hundred years like the girl in the fairy tale, from sheer inability to get rid of their time in any other way. But they sit and stitch, stitch, stitch, like a new version of the Song of the Shirt, and write letters to distant friends, the Lord knows what about. Here, Treby, take care of the ladies' wraps, will you," he said to a feeble old man in a threadbare suit of black, who was my lady's butler and house-steward, and was popularly supposed to clean the knives and fill the coal-scuttles in a cavernous range of cellars with which the mansion was undermined.

The Viscount led the way to the drawing-room, or saloon—that spacious apartment with the flesh-coloured panelling which had been originally designed for a music-room. It was a stately chamber, with six long windows, and two fireplaces with high narrow mantelpieces, upon each of which appeared a scanty row of tiny Nankin teacups. Scantiness was indeed the distinguishing feature of the Ashcombe furniture from garret to cellar, but was perhaps more strikingly obvious in this spacious apartment than in any other room in the house. A faded and much-worn Turkey carpet covered the centre of the floor—a mere island in an ocean of bees-waxed oak; a few spindle-legged chairs and tables were dotted about here and there; two hard-seated couches of the classic mould—their frames rosewood inlaid with brass, their cushions covered with a striped satin damask, somewhat frayed at the edges, and exhibiting traces of careful repair—stood at a respectful distance from each fireplace; and one easy-chair, of a more modern manufacture, but by no means a choice or costly specimen of the upholsterer's art, was drawn close up to the one hearth upon which there burned a somewhat meagre pile of small wood, the very waste and refuse of the timber-yard. Lady Paulyn was seated in this chair, with a little three-cornered shawl of her own knitting drawn tightly round her skinny shoulders, as if she would thereby have eked out the sparing supply of fuel. Miss Disney sat at one of the little tables remote from the fire, copying a column of figures into an account-book. Both ladies rose to receive their guests, but not with a rapturous greeting.

"It's very good of you to come all this way to see a quiet old woman like me," said the dowager, as if she had hardly expected them, in spite of Hilda's note "to remind."

"Why the deuce don't you have a fire in both fireplaces in such weather as this, mother?" the Viscount demanded,

shivering, as he placed himself on the centre of the hearthrug, and thus obscured the only fire there was.

"I never have had two fires in this room, Reginald, and I never will have two fires," replied the dowager, resolutely. "When I can't sit here with one fire, I shall leave off sitting here altogether. I don't hold with your modern luxurious habits."

"But it must have been an ancient habit to warm this room a little better than you do, or it would hardly have been built with two fireplaces," said Lord Paulyn.

"That, I imagine, was rather a question of architectural uniformity," replied the dowager.

"There's the luncheon-gong," said her son. "Perhaps we shall find it a little warmer in the dining-room."

There was a good deal of ceremony at Ashcombe, considering the scantiness of the household; and Lady Paulyn took no refreshment that was not heralded by beat of gong. Her little bit of roast mutton, or her fried sole and skinny chicken, cost no more on account of that majestic prelude, and it kept up the right tone, as my lady sometimes observed to Hilda. The luncheon to-day, though quite a festive banquet in comparison with the silver biscuit-barrel and mouldering Stilton cheese which formed the staple of the daily meal, was not too bountiful a repast. There was a gaunt piece of ribs of beef, bony and angular, as of an ox that had known hard times, at one end of the long table; a melancholy-looking roast fowl, with huge and scaly legs, whose advanced age ought to have held him sacred from the assassin, and who seemed to feel his isolated position on a very large dish, with a distant border of sliced tongue, lemon, and parsley. There were two dishes of potatoes, fried and boiled; there was a little glass dish of marmalade, that was made quite a feature of on one side of the board; and a similar dish containing six anchovies reposing in a grove of parsley, which enlivened the other side. There was an artistic preparation of beetroot and endive on a centre dish, and two ponderous diamond-cut celery glasses, scantily supplied with celery; these, with a pickle-stand or two, and a good deal of splendour in the way of cruets, gave the table an air of being quite liberally furnished.

The meal was tolerably cheerful despite a certain toughness and wooden flavour in the viands. Mr. Luttrell pleaded his sworn enmity to luncheons as an excuse for not eating anything; and conversed agreeably with the dowager, who had brightened a little by this time, and seemed determined to make the best of things. Lord Paulyn sat between Mrs. Chevenix and Elizabeth, and had a good deal to say for himself in one way or another. He was enchanted to hear that Elizabeth was to have a season in town next year.

"You must come to me for the Oxford and Cambridge, mind. Mrs. Chevenix," he said. "I always charter a crib—I beg your pardon—take a house on the river for that event. I thought Miss Elizabeth would never consent to be buried alive down here all her days. She isn't like my mother and Hilda. It suits them very well. There's something of the fossil in their composition, and a century or so more or less in a pit doesn't make any difference to them. I'm so glad I shall see you in town next year."

This to Elizabeth, and with an extreme heartiness. He could hardly behave like this to every pretty girl he met, Mrs. Chevenix thought; it must mean something serious; and in the dim future she beheld herself allied to the peerage, through her niece, Lady Paulyn.

The Viscount seemed very glad when luncheon was over, and he could carry off the two young ladies to see the family portraits.

"You won't care much about that kind of thing, I daresay," he said to Mrs. Chevenix, not caring to be troubled with that matron's society; "you'd rather stop and talk to my mother."

"There is nothing would give me more pleasure than a chat with dear Lady Paulyn," simpered aunt Chevenix, inwardly shuddering as she remembered her vain attempt to interest that inexorable dowager; "but my brother Wilmot seems to have a great deal to say to her, and if I have a passion for one thing above another, it is for family portraits, especially where the family is ancient and distinguished like yours."

"O, very well, you can come, of course. I'll show you the old fogies; my grandfathers and greatgrandfathers, and all their brotherhood and sisterhood."

"Miss Disney will accompany us, of course," said Mrs. Chevenix, smiling graciously at Hilda, who sat opposite to her, very fair to look upon in her waxwork serenity.

"O, Hilda knows the pictures by heart. She'd rather sit by the fire and spin; or go on with those everlasting accounts she is always scribbling for my mother."

"I will come if you like, Mrs. Chevenix," replied Hilda, ignoring her cousin's remark.

The party of exploration, therefore, consisted of three damsels, Mrs. Chevenix and Lord Paulyn; a party large enough to admit of being divided—a result which aunt Chevenix had laboured to achieve. Lord Paulyn straggled off at once with Elizabeth through the long suite of upper chambers, with deep oaken seats in all the windows—Hampton Court on a small scale—leaving Hilda to play cicerone for Mrs. Chevenix and Diana, whom her aunt contrived to keep at her side. This left the coast clear for the other two, whose careless laughter rang gaily through the old empty rooms. Merciless was the criticism

which those departed Paulyns suffered at the hands of their graceless descendant and Elizabeth Luttrell. The scowling military uncles, the blustering naval uncles, the smirking grandmothers and aunts, with powdered ringlets meandering over bare shoulders, or flowing locks and loose bodice of the Lely period. Lord Paulyn entertained his companions with scraps of family history, their mesalliances, extravagances, and other misdeeds which did not tend to the glorification of that noble race.

But Reginald Paulyn did not devote all his attention to his duties as cicerone. He had a great deal to say to Elizabeth about himself and his own affairs; and a great many questions to ask about herself, her likings, dislikings, and so on.

"I'm sure you're fond of horses," he said; "a girl with your superior intellect must be fond of horses."

"I did not know that taste was a mark of superior intellect; I may have a dormant passion for horseflesh, certainly, but you see it has never been developed. I can't go into raptures about Toby, that big horse you saw in the wagonette. I used to be very fond of Cupid, a pony that Blanche and I rode when we were children; but unfortunately Cupid grew too small for me, or at least I grew too big for Cupid, and papa gave him away. That is all my experience of horses."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Viscount, with a distressed air. "It seems a burning shame that a girl like you should get so little out of life. Why, you ought to have a couple of hunters, and follow the hounds twice a week every season; it would be an introduction to a new existence. And you ought to have a pair of thorough-bred ponies, and a nice little trap to drive them in."

Elizabeth laughed gaily at this suggestion.

"A clergyman's daughter with her own hunters and pony-carriage would be rather an incongruous person," she said.

"But you're not going to be a clergyman's daughter all your life. When you come to Loudon you'll see things in a very different light."

"London," repeated Elizabeth, with a little sigh. "Yes; I think I should like that kind of life; only the poor old home will seem ever so much more dismal afterwards. I sometimes fancy I could bear it better if there were not quite so many Sundays. The week-days would go drifting by, and one would hardly know how long the dreary time was, any more than one counts the hours when one is asleep. But Sunday pulls you up sharply with the reflection—'Another empty week gone; another empty week coming!' A day of rest, too, after a week of nothingness. What a mockery!"

"Sunday is a bore, certainly," said the Viscount. "People are so dam prejudiced. If it wasn't for Tattersall's, and the

Star-and-Garter—a rather jolly dinner-place near town, you know—Sunday would be unbearable. But I wouldn't hurry myself about coming back to Hawleigh after you've had a season in town, if I were you. Sufficient for the day, you know, as that fellow Shakespeare says. In the first place, it's a long way ahead; and in the second, you may never come back at all. Who knows?"

They were sitting on one of the deep old window-seats, waiting for the two young ladies and Mrs. Chevenix, that diplomatic person having contrived to ask Hilda so many questions about the pictures, and to be so fascinated ever and anon by glimpses of that flat waste of verdure called the park, as to detain her party for some time by the way, thus affording Elizabeth and the Viscount ample leisure for their tête-à-tête. They were sitting side by side in one of the windows; Elizabeth with her head resting against the ponderous shutter, the golden-brown hair melting into the rich brown of the polished oak, the heavy eyelids drooping lazily over the dark-blue eyes, the whole face in a half listless repose. Very different would have seemed the same face if Malcolm Forde had been her companion—radiant with a light and life whose glory Reginald Paulyn was destined never to behold.

"You can't tell what's in the future, you see," said the Viscount, looking curiously at the tranquil face opposite him. "Suppose I were to tell your fortune—eh, Miss Luttrell?"

"I should have to cross your palm with a piece of gold, perhaps, and I'm sure I haven't any."

"Never mind the gold. Shall I tell you your fortune?"

"I have no great faith in your prophetic power."

"You wouldn't say that if you saw my betting-book. I have not been out in my calculations three times since the Craven meeting."

"But that is quite another matter; you have some solid groundwork for your calculations there; and here you have none."

"Haven't I? Yes, I have; only you'd be offended if I were to tell you what it is. I must have your hand, please—no, the left," as she offered him the right with a somewhat reluctant air. "Yes, in this pretty little pink palm I can read a great deal. First and foremost, that it will be your own fault if ever you go back to Hawleigh parsonage as Miss Luttrell; secondly, that you can have as many hunters as you like at your disposal next winter; thirdly, that it will be your own fault if you have not your pony-carriage and outriders for the park in the following spring. That's my prophecy. Of course it will depend in a considerable measure upon yourself whether I prove a true prophet."

Elizabeth's heart beat a little faster as Lord Paulyn released

her hand, with just the faintest detention of those slim fingers in his strong grasp. Was not this the very realisation of her brightest, fondest dream of earthly glory? Rank and wealth, fashion and pleasure and splendour, seemed, as it were, flung into her lap, like a heap of gathered roses, without trouble or effort of her own to compass their winning; prizes in life's lottery that she had only thought of in a far-off way, as blessings which might come to her sooner or later, if fortune were kind—but prizes that she had thought of very much and very often—to be cast thus at her feet! For, although the Viscount had not in plain words offered her his hand and fortune, there was a significance in his tone, an earnestness in his looks, that made his speech almost a preliminary offer—a sounding of the ground, before taking a bolder step.”

She gave a little silvery laugh, which seemed a sufficient reply to Lord Paulyn's vaticination.

Even in that moment, with a vision of horses and carriages, country seats and opera-boxes, shining before her; dazzled with the thought of how grand a thing it would be actually to win the position she had talked of winning only in her wildest, most insolent moods; to prove to Gertrude and Diana, and all the little world which might have doubted or disparaged her, that she was indeed a superior creature, marked out by destiny for a splendid career—even amid such thoughts as these, there came the image of Malcolm Forde, a disturbing presence.

“Could I bear my life without him?” she thought; “could I ever put him quite out of my mind?”

All her worldly longings, her ignorant yearning for the splendours of this world, seemed hardly strong enough to weigh against that foolish passion for a man who had never professed any warmer regard for her than for the most commonplace young woman in his congregation.

“If he loved me, and asked me to be his wife, should I be foolish enough to marry him, I wonder?” she thought, while Lord Paulyn's admiring gaze was still rooted to her thoughtful face; “would I give up every pleasure I have ever dreamed about for his sake?”

The Viscount was happily unconscious of the turn which his companion's thoughts had taken. He fancied that it was his own suggestive remarks which had made her thoughtful.

“I fancy I hit her rather hard there,” he said to himself. “I don't suppose it will ever come to anything, and I have made my book so as to hedge the matrimonial question altogether; but if ever I do marry, that's the girl I'll have for my wife. Not a sixpence to bless herself with, of course—and there are no end of young women in the market who'd bring me a hatful of money—but a man can't have everything, and a girl who'd been

brought up in a Devonshire parsonage wouldn't be likely to have any extravagant notions calculated to ruin a fellow."

By which sagacious reflection it will be seen that the Viscount was not without the Pauly n virtue of economy.

Hilda's calm presence appeared anon upon the threshold or the open door, leading the way for the others; and this being the last of the state rooms, the Viscount's opportunities came to an end. He was hardly sorry for this, perhaps, having said already rather more than he wanted to say. "But that girl is handsome enough to make any fellow lose his head," he said to himself, by way of excuse for his own imprudence.

Miss Disney surveyed the two with a thoughtful countenance. "I hope you have been entertained with the pictures, Miss Elizabeth," she said, with the faintest possible sneer; "I had no idea that Reginald was so accomplished a critic as to keep you amused all this time."

"We haven't been looking at the pictures or talking of the pictures half the time," replied Elizabeth coolly. "You don't imagine one could interest oneself for an hour with those dingy old portraits. We have been talking of ourselves—always a most delightful subject."

Miss Disney smiled a wintry smile.

"Then if we have done with the pictures, we may as well go back to my aunt," she said.

"O, hang it all," exclaimed Lord Pauly n, looking at his watch, a bulky hunter that had been over more five-barred gates and bullfinches than fall to the lot of many timepieces, "there's an hour and a half before dinner; we can't shiver in that Siberian drawing-room all that time. Put on your wraps, and come for a walk in the park, and I'll take you round to the stables and show you my hunters."

Anything seemed preferable, even to aunt Chevenix, to that dreary drawing-room with its handful of fuel; so the ladies clad themselves in shawls and winter jackets, and sallied out with Lord Pauly n to inspect his domain.

There was very little to see in the park—a vast expanse of flat greensward dotted about by some fine old timber; here and there a young plantation of sycamore and poplar—the dowager affected only the cheapest kind of timber—looking pinched and poor in its leaflessness, protected by a rugged post-and-rail fence, with Lady Pauly n's initials branded upon every rail, lest midnight marauders should plunder her fences in their lawless quest for firewood. It was all very sombre and dreary in the early November twilight, and the black moorland above them took a threatening aspect, as of a sullen giant meditating some vengeance against the house of Ashcombe, which had lain a vassal at his feet so long.

"I would rather have the humblest cottage perched up yonder on the summit of that hill," cried Elizabeth, pointing to the dark edge of the moor, behind which the faint yellow light was fading, "than this grand house down here; there's something stifling in the atmosphere."

"You'd find it uncommonly cold up yonder in the winter," replied the Viscount in his practical way; "and Ashcombe wouldn't be half a bad place if it was properly kept up, with about six times the establishment my mother keeps. But she has her whims, poor old lady, and I'm bound to give way to them as long as she's mistress here."

"How good of you!" said Hilda; "how very good of you, to allow my aunt to deprive herself of luxuries and pleasures in order that you may be the richest man in the county!"

"You needn't indulge your natural propensity for sneering, at my expense, Miss Disney," replied Lord Paulyn rather savagely. "It amuses my mother to save money, and I let her do it. Just as I should let her keep a roomful of tame cats if she had a fancy that way. I don't think your position in the family is one that gives you a right to criticise my conduct."

The fair transparent face flushed faintly for a moment, but Miss Disney vouchsafed no answer; and Diana Luttrell plunged valorously into the gap with an eager demand to see the hunters before it grew quite dark.

"Very proper indeed," thought Mrs. Chevenix; "that kind of young woman requires a good deal of putting down. I never like these dependent cousins about a young man—especially if they happen to be good-looking."

She glanced at Miss Disney, a slim graceful figure of about middle height, dressed in a shabby black silk gown, but with a certain elegance that was independent of dress. A fair delicate face, in whose thoughtful calm the Chevenix eye could discover very little. She had only a general impression that these quiet young women are of all others the most dangerous.

They went to the stables to see Lord Paulyn's horses; and Mrs. Chevenix had to endure rather an uncomfortable quarter of an hour going in and out of loose boxes, where satin-coated steeds with fiery eyes jerked and champed and snorted at her with malignant intentions, or seemed so to champ and snort; but she bore it all with a lamb-like meekness: while Elizabeth patted the velvety noses of these creatures with her ungloved hand, and stood fearlessly beside them in a manner that went far to confirm the Viscount's belief in her vast superiority to the common order of women. Not that Hilda Disney showed any fear of the horses. She was as much at home with them as if they had been so many lap-dogs, and they seemed to know and love her, a fact which Mrs. Chevenix marked with a jealous eye.

“Love me, love my dog,” she thought; “some people begin by loving the dog.”

It was dark when they left the great roomy quadrangle where the long row of loose boxes had the air of so many cells for solitary confinement, and Miss Disney conducted them to one of the numerous spare bedrooms to readjust their toilets for the evening, a bedroom which was spare in every sense of the word; sparsely furnished with an ancient four-poster and half a dozen grim high-backed chairs, a darksome mahogany dressing-table, a tall narrow looking-glass which was a most impartial reflector of the human countenance, making every one alike hideous; sparsely lighted with a single candle in a massive silver candlestick, engraved with the Paulyn arms. Here Hilda left them to their own devices. There was no offer of afternoon tea, and Diana yawned dismally as she cast herself upon one of the high-backed chairs.

“How I wish it was over!” she exclaimed; “I don’t think I ever had such a long day. It’s all very well for Lizzie, she has Lord Paulyn to flirt with, and I suppose it’s rather nice to flirt with a Viscount. But Miss Disney is really the most un-get-on-able-with girl that it was ever my misfortune to encounter.”

“Miss Disney is a very clever young woman, my dear, for all that,” replied Mrs. Chevenix mysteriously; “rely upon it, she has her own views about her position here.”

“You mean that she would like to marry her cousin, I suppose,” said Elizabeth.

“I mean that to do that is the sole aim and object of her life,” replied Mrs. Chevenix with conviction, “but a design in which she will not succeed.”

“You’re so suspicious, auntie,” said Elizabeth carelessly. “Aren’t we to have any more candles? O, dear me, what a dreadful old place this is!—something like those goblin castles one reads of in German legends, where there are a number of huge ancient rooms and only one old steward, and where a traveller begs a night’s shelter, and is half frightened to death before morning.”

The dinner, which Elizabeth had looked forward to seeing as a kind of natural curiosity, was of a somewhat shadowy and Barmecide order, like the pale wraith of some decent dinner that had died and been buried a long while ago. There was Julienne, that refuge of the destitute in soups, a thin and vapid decoction, with a faint flavour of pot-herbs and old bones; there was filleted sole à la maître d’hôtel, with a good deal more sauce—a compound of the bill-sticker-and-paste-brush order—than sole. There was curry, that rock of refuge for the distressed cook—a curry which might have been veal or rabbit, or the remains of the ancient fowl that had graced the board at luncheon; and

there were patties also, of a somewhat flavourless order, patties that were curiously lacking in individuality. The joint is a more serious thing, and the cook, feeling that her art was here unavailing, came to the front boldly with a very small leg of Dartmoor mutton, which gave place anon to a brace of pheasants, the victims of Lord Paulyn's gun. The sweets were various preparations of a gelatinous and farinaceous order, stately in shape and appearance, and faintly flavoured with Marsala, or essential oil of almonds. The dessert consisted of biscuits, and almonds and raisins, a dish of wintry apples, and another of half-ripened oranges, and some fossil preparations of crystallised fruit, which looked like heir-looms that had been handed down from generation to generation of the Paulyns. This banquet—served with a solemn air, and a strict observance of the proprieties, by the ancient man-of-all-work and a puritanical-looking parlour-maid, who evidently had the ancient under her thumb, and who giped at him and scolded him ever and anon in the retirement of the sideboard—was a somewhat dreary meal; but Lord Paulyn had Elizabeth on his left hand, and found plenty to talk about with that damsel while the barren courses dragged their slow length along. Mr. Luttrell, to whom a good dinner was the very mainstay of existence, sought in vain to satisfy his appetite with the insignificant morsels of provision that were handed to him by the ancient serving-man; nor was he able to console himself for the poverty of the menu by a desperate recourse to the bottle; for the vintages which the ancient doled out to him were of so thin and sour a character, that he was inclined to think the still hock was more nearly related to the dowager's own peculiar brand of cider than that lady would have cared to acknowledge. He ate his dinner, however, or made believe to eat, with a cheerful countenance, heroically concealing the anguish that gnawed him within, and did his best to make himself agreeable to Lady Paulyn, who was a strong-minded old woman, read every line of the *Times* newspaper daily, and was up in all the ins and outs of the money market, being much given to the shifting of her investments, and to cautious little speculations and dabbings on her own account. The Vicar, who never had sixpence to invest, found it rather uphill work to discuss foreign loans, Indian irrigation companies, and American railways with this astute financier, and was glad when the conversation drifted into a political channel, when the dowager proclaimed herself an advanced liberal, with revolutionary notions about the income-tax.

He was hardly sorry when they all left the table together, after a small ration of very indifferent coffee had been served out by the ancient, "in the nice friendly continental fashion," as the dowager remarked with a sprightly air, and he found a quiet

little dark corner in the drawing-room—dimly illumined with two pair of sallow-complexioned candles, which gave a sickly light, as if just recovered from the jaundice—where he sank into a peaceful and soothing slumber, while Lady Paulyn played fox-and-geese with Mrs. Chevenix, who was enraptured by this small token of favour from the dowager. Lord Paulyn insisted upon playing *béziq*ue in a remote corner with Elizabeth, leaving Diana and Hilda to languish in solitude on one of the Grecian couches, Diana making feeble little attempts at conversation, which Miss Disney would neither encourage nor assist.

*Béziq*ue, which neither of the players cared about playing, afforded a delightful opportunity for flirtation, in a shadowy corner, where the four languishing candles made darkness visible; and it was an opportunity which Lord Paulyn contrived to make the most of. Yet he was careful, withal, not to commit himself to anything serious. There was always plenty of time for that kind of thing, and he had some years ago made up his mind never to marry, unless marriage should offer itself to him backed by very substantial advantages in the way of worldly wealth. But this girl, this country parson's daughter, had attracted and fascinated him as no other woman had ever done. He had, indeed, from his boyhood cherished an antipathy to feminine society, preferring to take his ease in a public billiard-room or a stable-yard, rather than to sacrifice to the graces of life in a drawing-room or *bondoir*. He was not in the least degree like that typical Frenchman of modern French novels who spends his forenoon in arraying himself like the lilies of the field, and then sallies forth, combed and curled and perfumed, to languish in the *bondoir* of the young Marquise de la Rochevielle till dinner-time, and after dinner elaborately at the *Café Riche*, repairs to the side-scenes of some easy-going theatre, to worship at the shrine of Mademoiselle *Battemain* the dancer; thus employing his life from morn till midnight in the cultivation of the tender passion.

Not often did Reginald Paulyn meet with a woman whose society he considered worth having; but there was in Elizabeth's manner something that charmed him almost as much as her beauty. She was so perfectly at her ease with him; showed at times an insolent depreciation of him, which was refreshing by its novelty; received his adulation with such an air of divine right, that he felt a delightful sense of security in her society. She was not trying to captivate him, like almost all the other young women of his acquaintance. Her mind was not filled to the brim with the one fact that he was the best match of the season.

“Do you think your father would let you ride,” he asked, “if I were to put a couple of horses at your disposal, and a

steady-going old groom I've got down here, who'd take no end of care of you?"

"I am quite sure papa would not; and even if he would, I have no time for riding."

"No time! Why, what can you find to occupy you down here?"

"I have my poor people to visit."

"What!" exclaimed the Viscount, with a look of mingled disgust and mortification. "You don't mean to say that you go in for that kind of thing? I thought your eldest sister did it all."

"I don't see why my sister should have a copyright in good works."

"No; but, really, I thought it was quite out of your line."

"Thanks for the compliment. But, you see, I am not quite so bad as I seem. I have taken to visiting some of papa's poorer parishioners lately, and I have found the work much pleasanter than I fancied it would be."

"Oh, you have taken to it lately," said Lord Paulyn, with a moody look. "I suppose it was that tall Curate who put it into your head?"

"Yes; it was Mr. Forde who first awakened me to a sense of my duty," replied Elizabeth fearlessly.

"How long has he been here, that fellow?"

"What fellow?"

"The Curate."

"Mr. Forde has been with us nearly two years."

After this the conversation languished a little, while Lord Paulyn meditated upon the possibilities with regard to Miss Luttrell and her father's Curate. She had flashed out at him so indignantly just now, as if his disrespectful mention of this man were an offence to herself. He determined to push the question a little closer.

"I daresay he's a very decent fellow," he said; "but I could never make much way with men of that kind. They seem a distinct breed somehow, like the zebra. However, I've no doubt he's a well-meaning fellow. I thought he seemed rather sweet upon your eldest sister."

Elizabeth gave a little scornful laugh.

"Mr. Forde is not sweet upon any one," she answered; "he is a priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedec; or after a more severe order, for I believe that matrimony was not forbidden to that ancient priesthood. Mr. Forde sets his face against it."

"An artful dodge upon his part, perhaps," said the Viscount, doubtfully. "I daresay he is lying in wait for a wife worth having."

His keen eyes surveyed Elizabeth's face with a searching gaze,

but could not read the mystery of that splendid countenance. He would have gone on talking about the Curate, but she checked him with an authoritative air.

"I wouldn't trouble myself to discuss Mr. Forde's inclinations, if I were you," she said; "you have confessed your inability to sympathise with that kind of person. He is a noble-minded man, who has marked out a particular line of life for himself. There is nothing in common between you and him."

"Candid," said the Viscount, with a careless laugh, "but not complimentary. No, I don't suppose my line of life is what you'd call noble-minded; but I mean to win a Derby before I die; and I mean to win something else too"—this with the bright, red-brown eyes full upon her face—"if I make up my mind to go in for it."

The wagonette was announced at this juncture, and Mr. Luttrell awoke from refreshing slumbers to gather his woman-kind around him, and depart from the halls of Ashcombe, rejoicing in his soul at this release.

"Thank goodness that's over!" he exclaimed, as he settled himself in a corner of the wagonette, half-smothered by his sister's ample draperies and cashmere shawl; "and if ever Lady Paulyn catches me trusting myself to her hospitality again, she may give me as miserable a dinner as she gave me to-day."

"Upon my word, Wilmot, I believe you are the most shortsighted of created beings," exclaimed Mrs. Chevenix, with a profound sigh.

"It would have required an uncommonly long sight to see anything fit to eat at that dinner," answered Mr. Luttrell. "Supper is a meal to which I have a radical objection; but if there's anything edible in the house when we get home to-night, I shall be strongly tempted to submit my digestion to that ordeal."

"I'm sure I could eat half a barrel of oysters," exclaimed Diana, with a weary air. "I never went through such a day in my life. It's all very fine for aunt Chevenix and Lizzie to be puffed up with the idea of having made a conquest, but anybody can see that Lord Paulyn is a professed flirt, and that his intentions are as meaningless as they can be."

"These are questions," said aunt Chevenix, with dignity, "which time alone can solve. I think we have had an extremely pleasant day, and that Lady Paulyn is a woman of wonderful force of character. Eccentric, I admit, and somewhat close in her domestic arrangements—I'm afraid my cap was on one side all the evening, from the inadequacy of light on the toilet-table when I dressed for dinner—but a very remarkable woman."

"That's a safe thing to say of anybody, aunt," replied Elizabeth. "Mrs. Brownrigg, who starved her apprentices to death was a remarkable woman."

CHAPTER X.

“ Who knows what’s fit for us ? Had fate
 Proposed bliss here should sublimate
 My being—had I sign’d the bond—
 Still one must lead some life beyond,
 Have a bliss to die with, dim-descried.”

WHETHER Lord Paulyn’s attentions were indeed meaningless, or whether serious intentions tending towards matrimony lurked behind them, was a question whose solution Time, the revealer of all secrets, did not hasten to afford. The Viscount spent about three weeks in Devonshire, during which period he contrived to see a good deal of the Vicarage people—calling at least twice a week, upon one pretence or another, and dragging out each visit to its extremest length. He was not an intellectual person, and had contrived to exist since the conclusion of his university career without opening a book, except only such volumes as could assist him in the supervision of his stables, or aid his calculations as a speculator on the turf. His conversation was therefore in no manner enlivened or adorned by the wit and wisdom of others; but he had a little stock of anecdotes and reminiscences of his career in the fashionable world, and of the “ fellows ” he had encountered there, wherewith to entertain his hearers. He had also a yacht, the Pixy, whose performances were a source of interest to him, and which afforded an occasional variety to his stable-talk. In fact, he made himself so agreeable in a general way, during his visits to the Vicarage, that Mrs. Chevenix pronounced him the most entertaining and original young man it had ever been her good fortune to encounter.

Elizabeth was not always at home when he called, but he contrived to spin-out his visit until her return; an endeavour in which he was much assisted by Mrs. Chevenix, who took care to acquaint him with her disapproval of this parish work, and her fear that dear Elizabeth was undermining her health by these pious labours.

“ If she were an ordinary girl, I should regard the thing in quite another light,” said aunt Chevenix; “ but Elizabeth is not an ordinary girl.” An opinion in which the Viscount concurred with enthusiasm.

“ It’s all that Curate’s doing,” he said. “ Why don’t you use your influence against that fellow, Mrs. Chevenix ? ”

“ O, you’re jealous of the Curate, are you ? ” thought the matron; “ then perhaps we can bring you on a little faster by that means.”

She gave a plaintive sigh, and shook her head doubtfully.

"I regret to say that my influence goes for nothing when Mr. Forde is in question," she said. "He has contrived to impress Elizabeth with the idea that he is a kind of saint."

"You don't think she cares for him?" asked the Viscount eagerly.

"Not in the vulgar worldly sense of the words, dear Lord Paulyn," said Mrs. Chevenix; "but she has a sensitive impressionable nature, and he has contrived to exercise an influence which sometimes alarms me. She is a girl who would hardly astonish me if she were to go over to Rome, and immure herself for life in a convent."

"That would be a pity," said the Viscount; "and it would be a greater pity if she were to marry some stick of a curate."

But he did not commit himself to any stronger expression than this; and he left Devonshire without making Elizabeth Luttrell an offer:—a fact which gave rise to a few sisterly sarcasms on the part of Gertrude and Diana. Blanche was more good-natured, and was really desirous of having a nobleman for her brother-in-law.

But before he departed from his native place Lord Paulyn dined two or three times at the Vicarage, having hung about late in the afternoon in such a manner as to invite Mr. Luttrell's hospitality. "I don't much wonder that he shirks his mother's dinners," remarked that short-sighted incumbent; nor did he see any special cause for self-gratulation when the Viscount spent his evenings in hanging over the piano while Elizabeth sang, or in teaching her the profound theories of *écarté*.

If the Vicar was slow to perceive anything peculiar in this gentleman's conduct, there were plenty of more acute observers in Hawleigh who kept a record of his movements, and told each other over afternoon teacups that Lord Paulyn must be smitten by one of the Vicarage girls.

Before the young man had left the neighbourhood, this rumour had reached the ears of Malcolm Forde.

He heard this scrap of gossip with a somewhat bitter smile, remembering the Sunday luncheon at the Vicarage, and to whom the Viscount's attention had been exclusively given.

"I am hardly sorry for it," he said to himself. "God knows that I have fought against my own folly in loving her so dearly—loving her with no higher hope or thought than a passionate delight in her beauty, a blind worship of herself, a sinful indulgence for her very faults, which have seemed in her so many additional charms; knowing her all the while to be the last of women to help me on in the path that I have chosen for myself, the very woman to hold me backward, to keep me down by the dead weight of her worldliness. I shall have reason to

be grateful to Lord Paulyn if he comes between us, and makes a sudden end of my madness."

Yet, with a curious inconsistency, when the Curate met Elizabeth in one of the cottages, he saluted her with so gloomy a brow and so cold an air that the girl went home miserable, wondering how she had offended him. That he could be jealous was an idea that never entered into her mind, for she had never hoped that he loved her. She went home that afternoon thinking him the coldest and hardest of mankind—a man whose gloomy soul no act of submission could conciliate; went home and avenged herself for that outrage by a desperate flirtation with the Viscount, who happened to eat his farewell dinner at the Vicarage that evening.

Lord Paulyn departed and made no sign: yet it is certain that he left Hawleigh as deeply in love with Elizabeth Luttrell as it was in his nature to love any woman upon this earth. But he was a gentleman of a somewhat cold and calculating temper, and was supported and sustained in all the events of life by an implicit belief in his own merits, and the value of his position and surroundings. He was not a man to throw himself away lightly. Elizabeth was a charming girl, and, in his opinion, the handsomest woman he had ever seen, and the very fittest to lend a grace and glory to his life in the eyes of his fellow-men—a wife he might be proud to see pointed out as his property on racecourses, or on the box-seat of his drag, as his favourite team drew themselves together for the start, on a field-day at Hyde-park Corner. But, on the other hand, there was no denying that such a match would be a very paltry alliance for him to make, bringing him neither advantageous connections nor addition to his fortune; and if on sober reflection, at a distance from the object of his passion, he found that he could live without Elizabeth Luttrell, why he might have reason to congratulate himself upon his judicious withdrawal that too delightful society.

"Mind, I shall expect to see you in town early in the season," he said to Elizabeth, when making his adieux. A speech which he felt committed him to nothing.

"You mustn't forget your promise to show us the university boat-race," said Mrs. Chevenix with her vivacious air.

She felt not a little disappointed that nothing more decisive had come of the young man's admiration; that he should be able thus to tear himself away unfettered and uncompromised. She had fondly hoped that he would linger on at Ashcombe till in some impassioned moment he should cast his fortunes at the feet of his enchantress. It was somewhat bitter therefore to see him depart in this cool manner, with only vague anticipations of possible meetings during the London season. Mrs.

Chevenix was well aware of a fact which the Viscount pretended to ignore, namely, that her set was not his set, and that it was only by means of happy accidents or diplomatic struggles that she and her niece could hope to meet him in society.

"But he will call, no doubt," she said to herself, having taken especial care to furnish him with her address.

Elizabeth gave a great sigh of relief as the Vicarage door closed for the last time upon her admirer. She had been gratified by his admiration, she had listened to him with an air of interest, had brightened and sparkled as she talked to him; but it was dull work at the best. There was no real sympathy, and it was an unspeakable relief to know that he was gone.

"Thank heaven that's over!" she exclaimed; "and now I can live my own life again."

After the Viscount's departure Mrs. Chevenix began to find life at Hawleigh a burden too heavy for her to bear. The ceremonial call which she and her two nieces had made at Ashcombe about a week after the dinner there, had resulted in no new invitation, nor in any farther visit from Lady Paulyn. Intimacy with the inexorable dowager, which aunt Chevenix had done her utmost to achieve, was evidently an impossibility. So about a week before Christmas Mrs. Chevenix and her confidential maid left the Vicarage, to the heartfelt satisfaction of Mr. Luttrell's household, and not a little to the relief of that hospitable gentleman himself.

December was nearly over. A long dreary month it had seemed to Elizabeth; and since that Sunday luncheon at which Lord Paulyn had assisted, Malcolm Forde had paid no visit to the Vicarage. Elizabeth had seen him two or three times in the course of her district-visiting, and on each occasion he had seemed to her colder and sterner of manner than on the last.

Gertrude was the only member of the family who made any remark upon this falling away of Mr. Forde's. The Vicar knew that he worked harder than any other labourer who had ever come into that vineyard, and was not surprised that he should lack leisure for morning calls; nor had he ever been a frequent visitor at the Vicarage. But Gertrude remarked with an injured air that of late he had ceased from calling altogether.

"I've no doubt he heard that Lord Paulyn was always here," she observed; "and of course that kind of society would not be likely to suit him."

"I can't see that papa's curates have any right to select our society for us," exclaimed Blanche, firing up at this. "Lord Paulyn was no particular favourite of mine, for he used to take about as much notice of me as if I were a chair or a table; and Mr. Forde is always nice; but still I can't see that he has any right to object to our visitors."

“No one spoke of such a right, Blanche,” answered her eldest sister; “but Mr. Forde is free to select his own society, and it is only natural that he should avoid a person of Lord Paulyn’s calibre.”

Elizabeth felt this defection keenly. It was not as if she had neglected her duties, or fallen away from the right path in any palpable manner. She had gone on with her work unflinchingly, even when, depressed by *his* coldness, her spirits had flagged and the work had grown wearisome. She had been constant in her attendance at the early services on dismal winter mornings, when the outer world looked bleak and uninviting. She had struggled to be good, according to her lights, perceiving no sinfulness in that flirtation with Lord Paulyn, which had helped to fill her empty life.

She missed the excitement of these flirtations when Lord Paulyn was gone. It was all very well to declare that he had bored her, and to express herself relieved by his departure; but she missed that agreeable ministration to her vanity. It had been pleasant to know, when she made her simple toilet for the home dinner, that every fresh knot of ribbon in her hair made her lovelier in the eyes of a man whose admiration the world counted worth winning—pleasant to discover that fascinations which had no power to touch the cold heart of Malcolm Forde possessed an overwhelming influence for the master of Ashcombe. Yet the end of her flirtation with the Viscount was hardly less humiliating to her than the coldness of the Curate. He loved and he rode away. She began to think that she had no real power over the hearts of men; that she could only startle and bewitch them by her beauty; hold them for but the briefest space in her thrall.

If the Viscount’s admiration had gone a step farther, and he had made her an offer, what would have been her reply? That was a question which she had asked herself many times of late, and for which she could find no satisfactory answer. The prospect was almost too dazzling for her to contemplate with a steady gaze. Had not a brilliant marriage been the dream of her girlhood? a vision first evoked by some prophetic utterances of aunt Chevenix, when Elizabeth was only a tall slip of a girl in a pinafore practising major and minor scales on a battered old piano in the school-room. She had dreamed of horses and carriages, and opera-boxes and country-seats, from the hour when she first learned the value of her growing loveliness at the feet of that worldly teacher. All that was basest in her nature, her ignorant yearning for splendour and pleasure, her belief in her divine right to be prosperous and happy, had been fostered, half unconsciously perhaps, by aunt Chevenix. Mrs. Luttrell was the weakest and simplest of women, and had always referred

to her sister-in-law as the very oracle of social existence, and had fondly believed in that lady as a leader of London fashion to her dying day. There had been no home influence in the Vicarage household to counteract the Chevenix influence, and although Elizabeth took a pride in defying her aunt upon occasions, she was not the less her faithful disciple.

Could she have refused such an offer from Lord Paulyn? Could she of her own free will have put aside at once and for ever—since two such chances would hardly come in her obscure life—all the delights and triumphs of this world, all the pleasures she had dreamed of? It hardly seemed possible that she could have been so heroic as to say no. It was very certain, on the other hand, that she did not care for Reginald Paulyn, that his handsome face had no charm for her, that the lingering clasp of his strong hand sent no thrill to her heart, that his society after the first half-hour became a bore to her. It was quite as certain that there was another man whose coldest look quickened the beating of her heart, whose lightest touch had a magical influence; for whose sake poverty would seem no hardship, obscurity no affliction; by whose side she could have felt herself strong enough to make life's pilgrimage over ever so thorny a road.

"I could hardly have been so demented as to refuse him," she thought, remembering that this one man for whom she could have so cheerfully sacrificed all her visions of earthly glory had no desire to profit by her self-abnegation.

Christmas was close at hand, and the Luttrell girls were busy from morning till evening with the decoration of the two churches; but Elizabeth performed her share of this labour with a somewhat listless air, and did a good deal more looking-on than Gertrude or Diana approved. She was beginning to be very tired of her work, tired even of her poor people, despite their affection for her. It seemed altogether such a dreary business, uncheered by Mr. Forde's counsel or approbation; not that he would have withheld his counsel, had she taken the trouble to ask for it; but she could not bring herself to do that. She remembered that October day in the Vicarage garden when they had walked together over the fallen leaves, while autumn winds moaned dismally, and autumn clouds obscured the sun—that day when they had seemed so near to each other, and when the dull gray world had been lighted with that light that never was on sea or shore—the light of a great joy. What would she not have done for his sake, if he had only taken the trouble to order her. If he had been a Redemptorist father, and had presented her with a cat-o'-nine-tails wherewith to go and scourge herself, she would have taken the whip from him with a smile, and departed cheerfully to do his bidding. But he asked no more from her than from any other member of that little band of ladies who helped him

in the care of his poor, and he distinguished her from that little band only by his peculiar coldness.

She flung down her garland of ivy and holly with an impatient air, in the midst of a little cluster of ladies working busily in the vestry of St. Clement's, the decorations whereof were but half completed.

"I shall do no more," she said; "my fingers ache and smart horribly. I am tired of the whole business; tired of parish work altogether."

Miss Melvin looked up at her friend wonderingly, with her meek blue eyes.

"Why, Lizzie, I'm surprised to hear you say that," she exclaimed. "Mr. Forde says you are the best of all his district-visitors, because you are sympathetic, and the poor people understand you."

"I feel very much honoured by his praise," said Elizabeth, with a scornful little laugh; "but as he has never taken the trouble to give me the slightest encouragement of late, I begin to find the work a little disheartening."

"Elizabeth has an insatiable appetite for praise," remarked Gertrude; "and I daresay she has been not a little spoiled by Lord Paulyn's absurd flatteries."

"You have been rather fortunate in escaping that kind of contamination, Gerty," replied Elizabeth, whose temper was by no means at its best on this particular Christmas-eve; "but I assure you it is rather nice to have a viscount for one's slave."

"Even when his bondage sits so lightly that he is able to shake it off at any moment," said Gertrude. To which Elizabeth would have no doubt replied, but for the sound of a firm tread upon the stone threshold, and the sudden opening of the door, which had been left ajar by the busy workers.

It was Mr. Forde on his round of inspection. Elizabeth wondered whether he had overheard that shallow unladylike talk about Lord Paulyn. She picked up her unfinished garland, and set to work again hurriedly, glad of any excuse for hiding her face from his cold gaze.

He did not stop long in the vestry, only long enough for a general good-morning, and a few questions about the decorations; nor did he address one word to Elizabeth Luttrell. Her face was still bent over her work, and the wounded fingers were moving busily, when she heard the door shut behind him, and his departing footstep on the pavement of the church.

He had come to the vestry-door just in time to hear Elizabeth's flippant speech about Lord Paulyn; a speech which to his mind seemed to reveal the utter shallowness and worthlessness of the woman he had suffered himself to love.

"And yet she has been able to cheat me into a belief in the

latent nobility of her nature; she has been able to bewilder my reason as she has bewitched my heart," he said to himself, as he walked slowly down the quiet aisle, and out into the bleak churchyard; "as she has distracted me from better thoughts and higher hopes, and has been an evil influence in my life from the first fatal hour in which I let her creep into my heart."

Even the Vicar's friendly invitation for Christmas-day was rejected by Mr. Forde. He would have been very happy to join that agreeable circle, he wrote, but it was a pleasure which he felt it safer to deny himself. The services on that day were numerous; there were sick people he had promised to see in the course of the day, and he should hardly have time for anything else, and so on.

He spent his day between the two churches and those sick-rooms, and his night in solitary reading and meditation; trying to lift his soul to that higher level whither it had been wont to soar before an earthly passion clogged its wings.

That he would, so far as it was possible to him in his position as Mr. Luttrell's curate, renounce and abjure the society of Mr. Luttrell's daughter, was a resolution that he had arrived at very promptly on hearing the town-talk about Lord Pauly's frequent visits at the Vicarage.

"I will not trust myself near her," he said to himself. "She has deceived me in the past, and would deceive me again in the future. I have no power to resist her witchery, except by separating myself from her for ever."

He was just strong enough to do this; he had just sufficient force of will to avoid the siren. Knowing the houses in which she was most likely to be found, her customary hours, the way she took in her walks, knowing almost every detail of her daily life, and how easy it would be for him to meet her, not once did he swerve from the rigid line which he had marked out for his conduct: he saw the familiar figure in the distance sometimes, and never quickened his step to overtake it. He heard that she was expected in a cottage where he was visiting, and hurried his departure straightway rather than run the hazard of meeting her. But it is hardly by these means that a man learns to forget the woman he loves. It is a kind of schooling that is apt to end another way. Perhaps no man ever yet forgot by trying to forget: but he is on the highway to forgetfulness when he tries to remember.

A poison had entered into Malcolm Forde's life. That sacred calling which demands the service of a heart uncorrupted by earthly passion began to weigh upon him like a bondage. It was not that he was in any manner weary of his office, but rather that he began to feel himself unfitted for it. A deadly sense of monotony crept into his mind. He began to doubt his

powers of usefulness; to fancy that his career at Hawleigh was like the round of a horse in a mill, grinding on for ever, and tending towards no higher result than that common daily bread. The natural result of these languors—these painful doubts of his own worthiness—was to turn his thoughts in that direction whither they had turned not unfrequently in the days when he had been better contented with his lot. He began to think more seriously than ever upon the missionary life which comes nearer to the apostolic form of service than the smooth pastures of the church at home. He collected all the information he could obtain upon this subject; wrote to men who had the work at heart, and who knew where a worker of his stamp was most wanted.

“I have a vigorous constitution,” he wrote to one of his correspondents, “and have hardly ever known a day’s illness. I am therefore not afraid of climate; and if I *do* finally determine to go, I should wish to go where such labour as I can give would be of real value; where a weaker man might be unfit to face the difficulties and dangers which I feel myself qualified to cope with and overcome. Do not think that I am boasting of my strength; I only wish to remind you that my former profession has in some measure inured me to peril and hardship, and that I should be glad to be able to employ some of that military spirit still inherent in my composition in the nobler service to which it is now my privilege to belong. I want to feel myself a soldier and servant of Christ’s church militant here on earth, in every sense of the word; and I do not in my present mood find the work of a rural parish adequate for the satisfaction of this desire.”

CHAPTER XI.

“’Tis the pest

Of love, that fairest joys give most unrest;
That things of delicate and tenderest worth
Are swallow’d all, and made a seared dearth,
By one consuming flame: it doth immerse
And suffocate true blessings in a curse.
Half happy, by comparison of bliss,
Is miserable.”

THAT Christmas at Hawleigh was not a peculiarly festive season. Mr. Luttrell being happily rid of his sister was indisposed for farther society, preferring to bask in the genial glow of his hearth untrammelled by the duties of hospitality. So the Luttrell girls sat round the fire on Christmas evening in a dismal circle, while their father, silent and motionless as the sculptured

figure of some household god, slumbered peacefully in his easy-chair behind the banner screen that had shaded the fair features of aunt Chevenix.

"I really do wish that boy-baby had lived," exclaimed Blanche after a long silence, alluding to an infant scion of the house of Luttrell which had perished untimely. "Of course, I know he'd have been a nuisance to us all—brothers always are—but still he'd have been something. He must have imparted a little variety to the tenor of our miserable lives. Papa would have been obliged to send him to Oxford or Cambridge, where he would have got into debt for shirt-studs and meerschaum pipes and things, no doubt; but he would have brought home nice young men, perhaps, in the long vacation, and that would be some amusement. He might have touted for papa in a gentlemanly way, and brought home young men to be coached."

"Blanche," exclaimed Gertrude, "you positively grow more revoltingly vulgar in your ideas every day."

"Let the poor child talk," cried Diana, with a stifled yawn. "I wonder she has spirit enough left to be vulgar. Any invertebrate creature can be ladylike, but vulgarity requires a certain amount of animal spirits; and I am sure such a miserable Christmas as this is a damper for any one's vivacity."

Elizabeth said nothing. She sat on a low seat opposite the fire, motionless as her slumbering father, but with her great dark eyes wide open, gazing dreamily at the smouldering yule log which dropped its white ashes slowly and silently into a deep chasm of dull red coal. She had sat thus for the last half-hour thinking her own thoughts, and taking no part in her sisters' desultory snatches of talk.

"She sat like Patience on a monument, smiling at grief," exclaimed Diana presently, exasperated by this silence. "Upon my word, Lizzie, you are not the best of company for a winter's night by the fire."

"I do not pretend to be good company," replied Elizabeth willy.

"How different it would be if Lord Paulyn were here!" said Diana, whose temper had been somewhat soured by the dreariness of that long evening; "then you would be all smiles and bewitchment."

"I should do my best to entertain a visitor, of course. I do not consider myself bound to entertain you."

"Poor Lizzie," murmured Diana, with an insolent air of compassion. "We ought not to be hard upon you. It is rather a trial for any girl to have a coronet dangled before her eyes in that tantalising manner, and nothing to come of her conquest after all!"

"Do you mean to say that I ever angled for Lord Paulyn,"

cried Elizabeth, with a sudden flash of scornful anger, "or that I could not have him if I chose?"

"I mean to say," replied Diana, in a provokingly deliberate manner, "that you and aunt Chevenix tried your very hardest to catch him, and did not succeed. Perhaps you look forward to seeing him in London, and subjugating him there; but I fancy that if a woman cannot bring an admirer to her feet in the first flush of her conquest, she is hardly likely to bring him there later. He has time for reflection and distraction, you see; and a man who has sufficient prudence to keep himself uncommitted as cleverly as Lord Paulyn did, would be the very man to cure himself of a foolish infatuation. I don't mean to say anything offensive, but of course a marriage with one of us would be a very disadvantageous alliance for a man in his position."

"You are extremely wise, my dear Di, and have acquired your wisdom in the bitter school of experience. But I doubt if you are quite infallible; and to show you that I am ready to back my opinion, as Lord Paulyn says, I will bet your poor dear mamma's pearl necklace, my only valuable possession, that if he and I live so long, I will be Lady Paulyn before next Christmas-day."

A foolish wager to make, perhaps, when her heart was given utterly to another man; but these little sisterly skirmishes always brought out the worst points in Elizabeth's character. She had been thinking too, as she watched the softly-dropping ashes, of all the grandeurs and pleasures with which she might have surrounded herself at such a season as this, were she the wife of Viscount Paulyn; thinking of that dismal old house at Ashcombe, and the transformation that she might effect there; the spacious rooms glowing with warm light, filled with pleasant people, new furniture, splendid draperies, life and colour throughout that mansion, where now reigned a death-like gloom and grayness, as if the dust of many generations had settled and become fixed there, covering all things with one sombre hue. These visions were strangely sweet to her shallow soul: and mingled with the thoughts of those possible triumphs there was always the thought of Malcolm Forde, and the impression that such a marriage would make upon him.

"He would see that at least some one can care for me," she said to herself; "that if I am not good enough for him, I may be good enough for his superior in rank and fortune."

And then came a vision of that tall figure and grave face among the witnesses of her wedding. He would take his subordinate part in the service, no doubt; "by the Vicar of Hawleigh, father of the bride, assisted by the Reverend Malcolm Forde."

"He would not care," she thought; "he would not even be angry with me. But he would preach me a sermon about my increased means of usefulness; he would expect me to become a sister of mercy on a wider scale."

After that joyless Christmas-time life seemed to Elizabeth Luttrell to become almost intolerable by reason of its dreariness. She gave up her spasmodic attempts at active usefulness altogether. She had emptied her purse for her poor; wearied herself in going to and fro between the Vicarage and their hovels; steeped herself to the lips in their difficulties and sorrows, and to some of them at least had contrived to render herself very dear; and having done this, she all at once abandoned them, stayed at home and brooded upon her vexations, sat for long hours at her piano, playing wild, passionate music, which seemed like a stormy voice answering her stormy heart.

"Let him come to me and remonstrate with me again," she said to herself, looking up with haggard eyes at the drawing-room door, as if she expected to see that tall figure appear at her invocation. "Let him come to reprove me, and I will tell him that I am tired of working without any earthly reward; that I have neither faith nor patience to labour for a recompense that I am only to win, perhaps half a century hence, in heaven. And who knows if I should see *his* face there, or hear *his* voice praising me?"

But the days went by, and Mr. Forde took no heed of this second defection.

One thing only gave colour to Elizabeth's life in this hopeless time, and that was the daily service in the big empty church of St. Clement's, at which she saw the cold grave face that had usurped so fatal a power over her soul. Once in every day she must needs see him; once in every day she must needs hear his voice; and it was to see and hear him that she rose early on those cheerless winter mornings, and shared the devotions of a few feeble old women in poke bonnets, and a sprinkling of maiden ladies with frost-pinched noses, showing rosy-tipped beneath their veils. It was not a pure worship which was wafted heavenward with Elizabeth's orisons: rather, no worship at all, but an impious adoration of the creature instead of the Creator; in every word in the familiar prayers, every sentence in the morning lessons, she heard the voice of the man she loved, and nothing more. *His* voice with its slow solemn depths of music; *his* face with its earnest eyes for ever overlooking her. These were the sole elements of that daily service. She went to church to see and to hear Malcolm Forde, and knew in her heart of hearts that it was for this alone she went; and in some remorseful moments wondered that Heaven's swift vengeance did not descend upon so impious a creature.

“How could I bear my life if I were married to another man, and it were a deadly sin to think of him?” she asked herself, wonderingly; and then argued with herself that in an utterly new life, a life filled to overflowing with the pleasures that had never yet been within her reach, pleasures that would have all the freshness and delight of novelty, she must surely find it an easy matter to shut Malcolm Forde’s image out of her heart.

“In what is he different from all other men that I should go on lamenting him for ever?” she thought. “If I lived in the world, I should meet his superiors every day of my life. But living out of the world—seeing only such people as Frederick Melvin and his fellow-creatures—it is hardly wonderful that I think him a demi-god.”

And then, in the next moment, with a passionate scorn of her own arguments, she would exclaim:—

“But he is above all other men! There is no one like him in that great world I am so ignorant of. There is no one else whose coldest word could seem sweeter than the praise of other men. There is no one else whose very shadow across my path could be more to me than the love of all the world besides.”

In this blank pause of her life, when all the machinery of her existence, which had for a long time been gradually growing abominable to her by reason of its monotony, seemed all at once to become too hateful for endurance; like a long dusty road, which for a certain distance the pilgrim treads with a kind of hopefulness, until, grown footsore and weary long ere the end of his journey, that long white road under the broiling sun, those changeless hedges, that pitiless burning sky, become an affliction hardly to be borne;—in this sudden failure of happiness and hope, it was not unnatural that Elizabeth’s eyes should turn with some kind of longing to the dazzling prospect perpetually exhibited to them by aunt Chevenix.

“Remember, my dearest Lizzie,” wrote that lady, whose longest epistles were always addressed to Elizabeth—“remember that you have a great future before you, and pray do not suffer yourself to be depressed by any remarks which *envy* or *malice* may dictate to those who *feel themselves* your inferiors in accomplishments and *personal appearance*. Your *fate* is in your own hands, my dearest girl, and it is you alone who can hinder, by a *foolish preference*, of which I cannot think with *common patience*, the very high advancement which I *feel assured* Fortune holds in reserve for you. But I venture to believe that your *absurd admiration* of Mr. F—— is a thing of the past. Think, my love, of the delight you would feel in being mistress of a *brilliant establishment*—in finding yourself the centre of an *aristocratic and fashionable circle*, invited to *state balls* and *royal garden-parties*—and then contrast this picture with the vision of some obscure

parsonage, its Sunday-school, its old women in black bonnets—that species of black bonnet which I imagine must be a natural product of the soil in agricultural districts, so inevitable is its appearance, and I can hardly believe there are people still living who would voluntarily *make* a thing of that shape. Look upon this picture, my dearest girl, and then on that,—as Pope, or some other old-fashioned writer, has observed,—and let reason be your guide. Easter, I am pleased to see, falls early this year, by which means we shall have done with Lent before the fine weather begins. I shall expect you as soon after Easter Sunday as your papa can manage to bring you.”

To this visit she looked forward as a release from that life which had of late become worse than bondage; but even in this looking forward there was an element of despair. She might have balls and garden-parties, and pleasures without number; she might wear fine dresses, and sun her beauty in the light of admiring eyes; but she would see Malcolm Forde no more. Would it not be happier for her to be thus divided than to see him day by day, and every day become more assured of his indifference? Yes, she told herself. And in that whirlpool of London life was it likely she would be for ever haunted by his image?

“It is this Mariana-in-the-moated-grange kind of life that is killing me,” she said to herself, as she sat by her turret window, preferring her fireless bedroom to the society of her sisters, watching the winter rain fall slowly in the drenched garden, and the dripping sun-dial by which she had stood so often talking to Malcolm Forde in the summer that was gone. It was arranged that Mr. Luttrell and his third daughter should go to London on the 30th of March, the Vicar treating himself to a week’s holiday in town, after the fatigue of the Easter services; a burden which was chiefly borne by the broad shoulders of Malcolm Forde. Towards the end of February, therefore, Elizabeth was able to occupy herself with the pleasing task of preparing for the visit; a business which involved a good deal of dressmaking, and a greater outlay than the Vicar approved. He grumbled and endured, however, as he had grumbled and endured when Gertrude and Diana spread their young pinions for their brief flight into those fashionable skies.

“It seems a nonsensical waste of money,” he said, with a doleful sigh, as he wrote a final clearing-up cheque for the Hawleigh dressmaker, “and I don’t suppose that your visit will result in anything more than your sisters’ visits. But Maria would lead me a life if I refused to let you go.”

“I beg your pardon, papa,” exclaimed Gertrude. “Pray do not make any comparison between Elizabeth and *us*. The belongs to quite a different order of beings, and is sure to make

a brilliant match. It is not to be supposed that the world can overlook *her* merits."

"I don't know about that," said the Vicar, with a rueful glance at the figures on his cheque; "but this seems a large amount to pay for dressmaking. I think girls in your position—the daughters of a professional man—ought to make your own gowns."

"The bill isn't all for dressmaking, papa; Miss March has found the material," said Elizabeth, waiving the question of what a girl in her position ought or ought not to do. "The trimmings are rather expensive, perhaps; but dresses are so much trimmed nowadays."

"Yes, that's what I hear on every side, when I complain of my bills," replied the Vicar. "Butcher's meat is so much dearer nowadays, says the cook; fodder has risen since last month, says the groom; Russia is consuming our coals, and prices are mounting daily, says the coal-merchant. But unhappily my income is not so elastic—that is a fixed quantity; and I fear the time is at hand when to make that square with our necessities will be something like attempting to square the circle."

The Luttrell girls were accustomed to mild wailings of this kind when the paternal cheque-book had to be produced, and cheques were signed as reluctantly as if they had been death-warrants waiting for the sign-manual of a tender-hearted king; so they were not deeply impressed by this threat of future destitution. They gave their minds very cheerfully to the preparation of their summer clothing; envied Elizabeth those extra garments provided for her approaching visit; quarrelled and made friends again after the manner of sisters whose affection is tempered by certain individual failings.

Frivolous as the distraction might be, this choosing of colours and materials, and trying-on of new apparel, served to brighten the bleak days of a blustering March with a feeble light. Elizabeth thought just a little less of her hopeless wasted love, while Miss March's head apprentice was coming to the Vicarage every day with patterns of gimps and fringes and laces and ruchings, for the selection whereof all the sisters had to be convened like a synod. Even Gertrude and Diana were not altogether ill-natured, and gave themselves up to these deliberations with a friendly air; while Blanche flung herself into the subject with youthful ardour, and wound up her approval of every article by the declaration that she would have one like it when she went to aunt Chevenix for *her* London season.

"Or perhaps you'll be married, and have a town-house, Lizzie, and I shall come to you; which would be much nicer than being under auntie's thumb. And of course you'd enjoy

bringing out a younger sister. Viscountess Paulyn, on her marriage, by Lucretia Viscountess Paulyn; Miss Blanche Luttrell, by her sister, Viscountess Paulyn. Wouldn't that look well in the local papers?"

CHAPTER XII.

“A man can have but one life and one death,
 One heaven, one hell. Let me fulfil my fate.
 Grant me my heaven now! Let me know you mine,
 Prove you mine, write my name upon your brow,
 Hold you and have you, and then die away,
 If God please, with completion in my soul!”

MR. FORDE'S letters brought a more definite response than he had looked for. One of the chief members of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel wrote, strongly urging him to lend himself to that vast work. It was just such men as he who were wanted, and the need for such was great. A new mission to a land of more than Cimmerian darkness was on foot; the harvest was ready; had long been waiting for the sickle, but fitting labourers were few. The letter was long and eloquent, and went home to Malcolm Forde's heart.

From the first, from that first hour in which the slumbering depths of his spirit had been stirred with a sudden rush of religious enthusiasm—like that strange ruffling of Siloam's still waters beneath the breath of God's angel—from that initial hour in which, beside the clay-cold corpse of her who should have been his wife, he dedicated his life to the service of his God, he had meant to do *something*—to make a name which should mark him out from the unnoted ranks of the Church—to accomplish a work which should be in itself the noblest monument that he could raise to the memory of his lost bride. Not in a quiet country parish could he find the fulness of his desires. It was something to have made a ripple upon this stagnant pool; something to have stirred the foul scum of indifference that had defiled these tideless waters. But having done this successfully, having awakened new life and vigour in this slumberous flock, he began to think in all earnestness that it was time for him to be moving forward. The life here was in no manner unpleasing to him; it was sweet rather, sweet in its utter peacefulness, and the fruition of all his present desires. He knew himself beloved and honoured; knew himself to have acquired unwittingly the first place, and not the second, in the hearts and minds of this congregation. But all this was not enough to the man who had made St. Paul his typical churchman—to the man who

boasted of himself as a soldier and servant of Christ. Very sweet was this pleasant resting-place; very dear the affection that greeted him on every side; the blushing cheeks and reverent eyes of school-children lifted to him as he went along the quiet street; the warm praises of men and women; the genial welcome that greeted him in every household; the hushed expectancy and upward look of rapt attention that marked his entrance to the pulpit. But precious though these things might be to him, they were not the accomplishment of his mission. It was as a pilgrim he had entered the Church; a teacher whose influence for good could not be used in too wide a field. Not in this smooth garden-ground could he find room for his labour; his soul yearned for the pathless forest, to stand with the pioneer's axe on his shoulder alone in the primeval wilderness, with a new world to conquer, a new race of men to gather into the fold of Christ.

This having been in his thoughts from the very first—a desire that had mingled with his dreams, sleeping and waking, from the beginning—it would have been curiously inconsistent had he shrunk from its realisation now. And yet he sat for a long time with that letter in his hand, deliberating, with a painful perplexity, on the course which he should take. Nor did that lengthy reverie make an end of his deliberation. He who had been won't to decide all things swiftly (his life-path being so narrow a thread, leading straight to one given point, his scheme of existence hardly allowing room for irresolution) was now utterly at fault, tossed upon a sea of doubt, perplexed beyond measure.

Alas, almost unawares, that mathematically adjusted scheme of his existence had fallen out of gear: the wheels were clogged that had gone so smoothly, the machine no longer worked with that even swiftness which had made his life so easy. He was no longer able to concentrate all his thoughts and desires upon one point, but was dragged to this side and to that by contending influences. In a word, he had given himself a new idol. That idea of foreign service, of toiling for his Master in an untrodden world, of being able to say, "This work is mine, and mine only!" which a little while ago had been to him so exhilarating a notion, had now lost its charm.

"Never to see her any more," he said to himself; "not even to know her fate! *Could* I endure that? O, I know but too well that she is not worthy of my love, that she is not worthy to divide my heart with the service of my God, not worthy that for her sake I should be false to the vow that I made beside Alice Fraser's death-bed; and yet I cannot tear my heart away from her. Sometimes I say to myself that this is not love at all, only a base earthly passion, a slavish worship of her beauty.

Sometimes I half believe that I never truly loved before, that my affection for Alice was only a sublimated friendship, that the true passion is this, and this only."

He thought of David, and that fatal hour in which the King of Israel, the chosen of the Lord, walked alone up on the housetop, and beheld the woman whose beauty was to be his ruin; thought and wondered at that strange solemn story with its pathetic ending. Was he stronger or wiser than David, when for the magic of a lovely face he was ready to give his soul into bondage?

For three days and three nights he abandoned himself to the demon of uncertainty; for three days and three nights he wrestled with the devil, and Satan came to him in but too fair a guise, wearing the shape of the woman he loved. In the end he conquered, or believed that he had conquered. There was no immediate necessity for a decisive reply to that letter, but he determined to accept the mission that had been offered him; and he began to make his arrangements with that view.

Having once made up his mind as to his future, it was of course his duty to communicate that fact to the Vicar without loss of time. So upon the first evening that he found himself at liberty, he walked out to the Vicarage to make this announcement. It was an evening in the middle of March,—gray and cold, but calm withal, for the blustering winds had spent their fury in the morning, and there was only a distant mysterious sound of fitful gusts sweeping across the moorland ever and anon, like the sighing of a discontented Titan. There was a dim line of primrose light still lingering behind the western edge of the hills when Malcolm Forde passed under the Bar, and out into the open country that lay beyond that ancient archway. He looked at the dim gray landscape with a sudden touch of sadness. How often had his eyes looked upon these familiar things without seeing them! The time might soon come when to remember this place, in its quiet English beauty, would be positive pain, just as it had been pain to him sometimes in this place to recall the mountains and the lochs of his native land.

"If I could but have lived here all the days of my life with Elizabeth for my fellow-worker and companion!" he thought. "I can conceive no existence happier than that, if I could be satisfied with small things. But for a man who has set all his hopes on something higher, surely that would be a living death. I should be stifled in the languid sweetness of such an atmosphere."

He thought of himself with a wife and children, his heart and mind filled with care for that dear household, all his desires, all his hopes, all his fears converging to that one centre—only

the remnant of his intellectual power left for the service of his God.

“A man cannot serve two masters,” he said to himself. “Sweet fancy, sweet dream of wife and home, I renounce you! There are men enough in this world with the capacity for happiness. The men who are most needed are the men who can do without it.”

The Curate stood for some moments before the Vicarage gate with a thoughtful air, but instead of opening it, walked slowly on along the waste border-land of unkempt turf that edged the high-road. Just at the last moment that new habit of indecision took hold of him again. He had hardly made up his mind what to say. He would find Mr. Luttrell with his daughters round him most likely. Elizabeth’s clear eyes would peruse his face while he pronounced his sentence of banishment. He was not quite prepared for this interview, and strolled on meditatively, in the cold gray twilight, wondering at his own unlikeness to himself.

“Will she be sorry?” he wondered, “just a little grieved to see me depart out of her life for ever? I remember when I spoke of my missionary schemes, that day I told her the story of my life, there was a shocked look in her face, as if the idea were dreadful to her. And then she began to talk of missionaries, with the air of a schoolgirl, as a low sort of people. She is such an unanswerable enigma. At times deluding one into a belief in her soul’s nobility—at other times showing herself frivolous, shallow, empty in brain and heart. Yet I think—after her own light fashion—she will be sorry for my going.”

Then arose before him the image of Lord Paulyn, and the memory of that Sunday luncheon at the Vicarage; the two faces turned towards each other—the man’s face ardent, enraptured—the girl’s glowing with a conscious pride in its loveliness; two faces that were of the earth, earthy—a brief scene which seemed like the prelude of a drama wherein he, Malcolm Forde, could have no part.

He bethought himself of that mere fragment of conversation he had overheard unawares on the threshold of the vestry, a gush of girlish confidence, in which Elizabeth had boldly spoken of the Viscount as her “slave.” He remembered that common talk in which the Hawleigh gossips had coupled Lord Paulyn’s name with Elizabeth Luttrell’s, and he thought, with a pang, that this was perhaps the future which awaited her. He thought of such a prospect with more than common pain, a pain in which selfish regret or jealousy had no part. He had heard enough of Lord Paulyn’s career to know that the woman who married him would prepare for herself a doubtful future; in all likelihood a dark and stormy one.

"If I can get a minute's talk alone with her before I leave this place, I will warn her," he said to himself; "though, Heaven knows, if her heart is set on this business, she is little likely to accept my warning."

He wasted half an hour idling thus by the way side, and in all that time had been thinking wholly of Elizabeth, instead of pondering on what he should say to her father. But about that there need be no difficulty. He had never yet found himself at a loss for words: and though Mr. Luttrell would doubtless be reluctant to lose so energetic a coadjutor, his affliction would hardly be overwhelming. There was always a fair supply of curates in the ecclesiastical market of various qualities; indeed, the supply of this article was apt to be in excess of the demand.

It was past seven when Mr. Forde entered the Vicarage. The six-o'clock dinner was fairly over, the lamp lighted in the long low-ceiled drawing-room, the four girls grouped round the fire in their favourite attitudes—Elizabeth on her knees before the blaze, gazing into the heart of the fire, like a prophetess intent on reading auguries in the coals. She started to her feet when the servant announced Mr. Forde, but did not leave the hearth to greet him, though her three sisters crowded eagerly about him to give him a reproachful welcome.

"It is such an age since you have been near us," said Gertrude, almost piteously. "I cannot think what we have done to offend you."

"You must know that I have had no possible reason for being offended, dear Miss Luttrell," he answered cordially, but with his glance wandering uneasily towards that other figure rooted to the hearth. "Your house is only too pleasant, and I have had very little time for pleasure. I see your papa elsewhere; and to come here is only another name for giving myself a holiday."

Gertrude cast up her eyes in a kind of ecstasy.

"What a saint you are!" she exclaimed; "and what a privilege to feel your blessed influence guiding and directing one's feeble efforts! I have felt myself almost miraculously assisted in my poor work since you have been with us, and I look back and remember my previous coldness with a shudder."

"I have no consciousness of my saintship," said Mr. Forde, with a little good-natured laugh, making very light of an elderly-young ladylike worship to which he was tolerably accustomed. "On the contrary, I have a strong sense of being very human. But I am glad if I have been the source of enthusiasm in you, and trust that when I am no longer here to guide or inspire—quite unconsciously again—you will not be in any danger of falling away. But I do not fear that contingency"—this with

a somewhat severe glance in the direction of that figure by the hearth—"for I believe that you are thoroughly in earnest. There is no such thing as earnestness without constancy."

Elizabeth took up the challenge and flashed defiance upon the challenger.

"O, Gertrude was born good!" she said. "I wonder papa took the trouble to christen her. It is impossible that she could have been born in sin and a child of wrath, like the rest of us. She is never tired of church-going and district-visiting; she has no intermittent fever of wickedness, as I have."

"When you are no longer here, dear Mr. Forde!" cried Gertrude, deaf to her sister's sneers, with her hands clasped, and her somewhat-faded gray eyes opened very wide, and gazing at the Curate with a wild surmise. "You surely do not mean that you are thinking of leaving us?"

"I have been nearly two years at Hawleigh," he answered quietly; "longer than I intended to remain when I first came here—two very happy years; but I have awakened lately to the conviction that Hawleigh is not all the world, only a very pleasant corner of it; and that if I stamp my name upon nothing larger than a country parish, I shall scarcely have realised the idea with which I entered the Church."

"You have been offered a church in London perhaps," gasped Gertrude dolefully.

Diana and Blanche had seated themselves, and watched the little scene with a sympathetic air, regretful but not despairing. They would be very sorry to lose Mr. Forde, who was tall, and good-looking, and gentlemanlike, and had money of his own; but perhaps the vast ocean of curates might cast up at their feet even a more attractive specimen of that order, a man better adapted for picnics, and small tea-drinkings, and croquet.

"You are going out as a missionary," cried Elizabeth with conviction.

They all turned to look at her, startled by the certainty of her tone. She had not stirred from her position by the hearth, but stood there confronting them, calm as a statue, a curious contrast to the distressed Gertrude, who was wringing her hands feebly, and gazing at the Curate with a half-distracted air.

The single lamp stood on a distant table; but even in the doubtful light Mr. Forde fancied that Elizabeth's face had grown suddenly pale.

"You are going out as a missionary," she repeated, as if she had by some subtle power of sympathy shared all his thoughts from the hour in which he briefly touched upon his views in his one confidential talk with her.

"You are good at guessing," he said. "Yes, I am going."

"O" cried Gertrude, "it is like your apostolic nature to con-

template such self-sacrifice. But, O, dear Mr. Forde, consider your health,—and the natives.”

“I don't think St. Paul ever gave much consideration to his health, or the question of possible danger from the natives,” answered Mr. Forde, with his grave smile; “and if you insist upon comparing me with saints and apostles, you would at least expect me to be as regardless of any peril to myself as the numerous gentlemen who have spent the best part of their lives in this work.”

“Those lives may not have been so precious as yours, Mr. Forde.”

“Or they may have been much more precious. There are very few to regret me, should the chances of war be adverse.”

Again he stole a glance at Elizabeth. She stood firm as a rock, and was now not even looking his way. Her eyes were bent upon the decaying fire, with that customary prophetic look. She might have been trying to read his fate there.

“However,” he continued, “the die is cast. I have arrived at the conviction that I am more wanted yonder, to dig and delve that rugged soil, than to idle among the delights of this flower-garden. And I came here this evening to announce my determination to Mr. Luttrell. Do you know if I shall find him in his study?”

“Papa has gone into the town, to the reading-room,” said Blanche.

“Then I can take my chance of finding him there,” said the Curate, preparing to depart.

“O, Mr. Forde, how unkind to be so anxious to run away, when this is perhaps almost your last visit. You must stop to tea, and you can tell us about your plans; how soon,” with a little choking noise, “you really mean to leave us.”

“I will stop with much pleasure, if you like,” he answered, putting down his hat, which Gertrude took up with a reverent air, as if it had been a mitre, and removed to a convenient abiding place. “As to my plans, they are somewhat vague as yet. I have little to tell beyond the one fact that I am going. Only I thought it due to Mr. Luttrell to give him the earliest information of that fact, insignificant as it may be.”

“It is not insignificant,” exclaimed Gertrude. “Hawleigh never had such a gain or such a loss as you will have been to it. Will it be”—with another little choking interval, like a strangled semicolon—“very long before we lose you?”

“I do not know what you would call long. About a month, perhaps.”

“Only a month—only four more blessed Sundays! O, Mr. Forde, that is sudden!”

“Do not suppose that I am not sorry to go,” said Mr. Forde.

"I am very fond of Hawleigh. But that other work is a part of an old design. I have only been trying my strength here."

"Only fluttering your wings like a young eagle before soaring to the topmost mountain peaks," exclaimed Gertrude with a little gush of poetry, raising her tearful eyes to the ceiling, in the midst of which burst the maid brought in the tea-tray, and Miss Luttrell seated herself to perform her duties in connection therewith, not without a consolatory pride in the silver tea-service. She was the kind of woman to whom even in the hour of despair these things are not utterly dust and ashes.

Elizabeth had seated herself in an arm-chair by the fire, on which her gaze was still gravely bent. She made no farther attempt to join in the conversation, but sat silent while Gertrude persecuted the Curate with questions about his future career, not consenting to be put off with vague or careless answers, but evincing an insatiable thirst for exact information upon every point.

Scarcely did Elizabeth lift her eyes from that mute contemplation of the fire when Mr. Forde carried her a cup of tea. She took it from him with a murmured acknowledgment, but did not look up at him, or give him any excuse for lingering near her. He was obliged to go back to his chair by the round table at the other end of the room, and sit in the full glare of the lamp, submitting himself meekly to Gertrude's cross-questioning. He bore this infliction perhaps with a greater patience than he might otherwise have shown, for the sake of that quiet figure by the hearth. Against his better judgment, even although the plan of his life was fixed irrevocably, and Elizabeth Luttrell's image excluded from it, there was yet a pensive sweetness in her presence—her silent presence—the sense of being near her.

"What does it matter if the pleasure is a foolish one?" he thought: "it must needs be so brief."

He stayed about an hour, sipping orange pekoe, and talking somewhat reluctantly of his hopes and views, for he was a man who deemed that in these things silence is golden. He tried to turn the thread of talk another way, but Gertrude would not be put off.

"O, let us talk of you and your future, dear Mr. Forde," she exclaimed, with her accustomed air of pious rapture. "It will be such a comfort when you are gone to be able to think of you, and follow your footsteps on the map."

The clock struck the half-hour after nine, and Mr. Luttrell had not yet appeared, so the Curate rose to depart, and went across to the hearthrug to bid Elizabeth good-night.

"You had better say good-bye at the same time," said Diana. "Your visits are so few and far between that I daresay Lizzie will have gone away before we see you again."

"Gone away!"

"Yes; she is going to town in a fortnight to stay with aunt Chevenix."

"Indeed." This in a disappointed tone, yet it could matter so little to him whither she went, when he was about to disconnect himself altogether from Hawleigh. Only he disapproved of aunt Chevenix in the abstract, and it was disagreeable to him to hear that the woman he had admired, and at times even believed in, was about to be subject to her influence.

"I believe you are half a Puritan at heart, Mr. Forde," said Diana, "and that you look upon all fashionable pleasures as criminal. I could read it in your face one day when auntie was holding forth upon her delectable land in the regions of Eaton-place."

"I have no passion for that kind of thing, I admit," answered the Curate. "But I trust that your sister Elizabeth will pass safely through that and every other ordeal. If good wishes could insure her safety, mine are earnest enough to count for something."

He shook hands with Elizabeth as he said this. The hand she gave him was very cold, and he fancied even that it trembled a little as his strong fingers closed on it. Then followed Gertrude's effusive farewells. He would come to see them oftener, would he not, now that his hours among them were numbered? Diana and Blanche were also effusive, but in a milder degree, having already been speculating upon the possible attributes of a new curate. In so dull a life as theirs even the agony of such a parting was not unpleasing distraction, like that abscess in the cheek from which an Austrian archduchess derived amusement in her declining years.

While these farewells were being somewhat lengthily drawn out, Elizabeth slipped quietly from the room. Mr. Forde heard the flutter of her dress, and looked round for a moment, to discover that her place was vacant. How empty did the room seem to him without her!

He dragged himself away from the reluctant Gertrude at last, and felt not a little relieved when he found himself in the open air, under a windy sky; the moon shining fitfully, with swift clouds scudding across her silvery face, the night winds sighing among the laurels on the leafy bank that shadowed the almost empty flower-border, where a fringe of daffodils showed pale in the moonlight. Mr. Forde walked slowly towards the gate, over the lawn on which he had condescended to foolish games of croquet in the summers that were gone, thinking of Elizabeth, and her curious apathetic silence, and the almost deathlike coldness of the hand that had touched his.

"She is the strangest girl," he said to himself, "and there are moments when I am half tempted to think——"

He did not finish the thought even to himself, for looking up suddenly he beheld a figure standing before him on the edge of

the lawn, a woman's figure, with a shawl of fleecy whiteness, folded Arab-wise, and shrouding it almost from head to feet. Yet even thus muffled he knew the figure by its bearing; a loftier air than is common to modern young-lady-hood—something nearer akin to the untutored grace of an Indian princess.

“Elizabeth!”

“Yes, Mr. Forde. I have come out here to ask you if it is true,—if you do really intend to fling away your life like that?”

“There is no question of my flinging away my life,” he answered quietly, yet strangely moved by her presence, by the smothered passion in her tone. “I shall be as much in the hands of God yonder as I am here.”

“Of course,” she answered in her reckless way, “God is with us everywhere, watching and judging us. But He suffers human sacrifices, even in our day. It may be in the scheme of Providence that you should be eaten, or scalped, or tomahawked, or burnt alive by savages.”

“Be sure that if it is, the thing will happen.”

“O, that is your horrible Calvinistic doctrine; almost as bad as a Turk's. But if you do not leave England you cannot fall into the hands of those dreadful savages.”

“And perhaps remain at home to be killed in a railway accident, or die of smallpox. I hardly think the savages would be worse; and if I felt I had done any good among them, there would be a kind of glory in my death, which might take the sting out of its physical pain.”

“‘The path of glory leads but to the grave,’” said Elizabeth gloomily. “Don't go, Mr. Forde. There are heathens enough to convert in England.”

“But I feel that my vocation calls me yonder.”

“It is a mere fancy. You were a soldier the other day, and cannot forget the old longing for foreign service.”

“Believe me, no; I have considered this business with more deliberation than is usual to me, and I am quite convinced that my duty lies in that direction.”

“A delusion! You would be greater and more useful in England. Your countryman, Edward Irving, had once that fancy, I remember; he had his ideal picture of a missionary's life, and seriously thought of trying to realise it.”

“Better for himself, perhaps, if he had achieved that early aim, than to be a world's wonder for a few brief years, and die the dupe of a disordered brain.”

“Don't go, Mr. Forde!” clasping her hands, and looking up at him so piteously with her lovely eyes, so different from the seraphic gaze of poor Gertrude's faded orbs. “I wish to Heaven I were eloquent, and knew how to plead and argue as some people do.”

“You are only too eloquent; your words go to my heart. For God’s sake, say no more!”

“Yes, yes, I will say much more; if I can touch you, if my words can penetrate your obstinate heart, you shall not go. I am pleading for Hawleigh, and all the people who love you, who have drawn their very faith and hope from you, as if your soul were a fountain of righteousness. I have a presentiment that if you go to those savage islands it will be to perish; to lose your life for a vain dream. Stay here, and teach us to be good. We were half of us pagans till you came to us.”

They had walked on towards the gate while they were talking. They now stood close beside it; Elizabeth with one bare hand clasping the topmost bar, as if she meant to hinder the Curate’s exit till she had extorted the recantation of his vow.

There was a little pause after her last speech. Malcolm Forde stood looking downward, thinking of what she had said; thinking of it with a passionate delight which was new and strange to his soul; a rapture which had been no element in his love of Alice Fraser. Suddenly he took the hand that hung loosely by Elizabeth’s side.

“If I were weak enough, mad enough, to prefer my own happiness to the call of duty, I should stay here,” he said; “you ought to know that.”

“I know nothing except that you have been hard and cruel to me always, in spite of all my feeble endeavours to please you,” answered the girl with the faint touch of the pettishness common to undisciplined beauty.

“Your endeavours to please me!” he repeated. “Could I think you valued my opinion? If I had imagined that; if I could have supposed, for one presumptuous moment, that you loved me——”

“If you could have supposed!” she cried impatiently. “You must have known that I loved you, that I have hated myself for loving you, that I hated you for not loving me.”

No swift answer came from his lips, but she was clasped in his arms, held close against his heart, his passionate heart, which had never beaten thus until this moment.

“My darling, my darling!” he said at last, in the lowest fondest tones that ever stole from a lover’s lips. “I never knew what passionate love meant till I knew you.”

“Not when you loved Alice Fraser?” she asked doubtfully.

“Not even for my sweet Alice. I loved her because she was as good as she was beautiful, because to love her seemed the nearest way to heaven. I love you even when you seemed to lead me away from heaven.”

“Because I am so wicked,” she said with a shade of bitterness.

“No, darling; only because you are not utterly perfect;

because to love you is to be too fond of this sweet world, to be less eager for heaven. O my dearest, what a slave you can make of me! But beware of this passionate love which you have kindled in a heart that tried so hard to shut you out. It is jealous and exacting, tyrannic, perilous—perilous for you and for me. It is of the earth, earthy. I love you too much for the sake of your beauty, too much for the magic of those lovely eyes that seem sweeter to me than summer starlight.”

“And if something were to happen to me that would spoil my good looks for ever, you would leave off loving me, I suppose?” she said.

“No, dearest, you would still be Elizabeth. There is a nameless, indefinable charm which would be left even if your beauty had perished.”

“Then you do not love me for the sake of my beauty?” she asked persistently, as if she were bent on plucking out the heart of his mystery.

“Not now, perhaps; but I fear it was that which won me. I never meant to love you, remember, Elizabeth. No battle was ever harder fought than mine against my own heart and you, nor ever a battle lost more ignominiously,” he added, with a faint sigh.

“Thank Heaven it is lost!” she said; “not for my sake—I will not claim so unwilling a victim—but for your own. You will not go to the Antipodes to be eaten by savages?”

“Not if you offer me the supremest earthly happiness at home. I will try to do some good in my generation, and yet be happy. I will forget that I ever had any higher aspiration than to tread the beaten tracks. I will try to be useful in my small way—at home.”

This half-regretfully, even with her bright head resting on his shoulder, her lovely eyes looking up at him with an almost worshipping fondness.

“And you will help me to lead a good life, will you not, Elizabeth?” he asked earnestly.

“I will be your slave,” she said, with a strange blending of scorn and pride—scorn of herself, intensest pride in him. “I will be your dog, to fetch and carry; the veriest drudge in your parish work, if you like. I can fancy our life: in the dreariest parsonage that was ever built, a wild waste of marsh and fen round about us, a bleak straggling street of hovels for our town, not a decent habitation within ten miles of us, only the poor with their perpetual wants, and ailments, and afflictions. I can fancy all this, and yet my life will be spent in paradise—with you.”

Sweet fooling in which lovers delight! Doubly sweet to Malcolm Forde, to whom it was so new.

“My dearest and best,” he said, smiling at her enthusiasm,

"I will forgive you the marshes and fens; that is to say, we will not go out of our way to find them. But we will go wherever we are most wanted."

"To a nice manufacturing town, for instance, where there will be a perpetual odour of soap-boiling and size-making, and soot blowing in at all our windows."

"Perhaps to such a town, darling; but I would find you a nest beyond the odours of soap-boiling."

"Or if you have set your heart on a mission to the Dog-rib Indians, or the Maoris, or the Japanese, I will go with you. Why should I have less courage than that noble creature, Lady Baker? Indeed, on reflection, I think I should rather like such an adventurous existence. If one could go about in a yacht, now, and convert the heathen, it would be really nice."

"I will not risk a life so precious to me. No, dearest, we will be content with a narrower sphere. After all, perhaps a clergyman who has a wife may be of more use than a bachelor in an English parish; she can be such a valuable ally if she chooses, almost a second self."

"I will choose to be anything that you order me to be," she answered confidently.

"But, O, my darling, are you really in earnest?" he asked in his gravest tone, scrutinising the upturned face with a serious searching gaze. "For pity's sake, Elizabeth, do not fool me! You have told me that you are fitful and inconstant. If—if—this love, which fills my soul with such a fond delight, which changes the whole scheme of my existence in a moment,—if, on your part, it is only a brief fancy, born perhaps of the very idleness and emptiness of your life, let us forget every word that we have said. You can trust me, darling; I shall not think less of you for being self-deluded. Consider in time whether it is possible for you to change; whether the kind of life which you speak of so lightly would not really seem dismal and unendurable to you when you found yourself pledged to go on living it to the end of your days; whether there is not in your heart some hankering for worldly pleasures and worldly triumphs: a longing which might grow into a regret when you had lost all hope of them for ever. To marry me is to accept a life that must be lived chiefly for others. My wife must be a lay sister of charity."

"Have I not told you that I will be your slave?" she answered; and then withdrawing herself suddenly from his arms, "O, I begin to understand," she said, with a deeply wounded air; "it is I who have been offering myself to you, not you to me, and you are trying to find a polite mode of rejection. Why are you not more candid? Why not humiliate me at once by saying, 'Really, Miss Luttrell, your readiness to sacrifice yourself is most obliging, only I do not happen to want you?'"

“Elizabeth, you know that I love you with all my heart and mind.”

“Do you? No, I cannot believe it; I have wished it too much; no one ever obtained anything so ardently wished for. It is not in nature that I should be so happy.”

“If there is any happiness in being assured of my love, drink the draught freely. It is, and has been yours almost since the beginning of our acquaintance.”

“There is more than happiness, there is intoxication!” she answered in her fervent unmeasured fashion. “Not because you are handsome,” she went on, with an arch smile; “for in that respect I am superior to you. It was not your face that won me. I love you because you seem to me so much above all other men; because you have dominion over me, in fact. I did not think it could be so sweet to have a master.”

“Say, rather, a guide and counsellor, dearest. There shall be no question of dominion between us. I want your life to be as happy as mine will be in the possession of your love.”

“But I insist upon your being my master!” she answered impetuously. “I am not a creature to be guided or counselled; see how little influence papa has ever exercised over me with his mild bewailings and lamentings, or Gertrude with her everlasting sermonising. Believe me, I must be commanded by a being stronger than myself. Even my love for you is slavish. See how little value I could have set upon my dignity as a woman when I came out here to-night to make my supplication to you. But I did not mean to betray myself. I only meant to plead for the people of Hawleigh. You will not think me too contemptible, will you, Malcolm?”

The name was half whispered. It was the first time she had ever pronounced it.

“Contemptible!” A lingering kiss upon the broad white brow made the rest of his answer.

How long this kind of talk might have lasted is an open question, but at this moment Elizabeth’s quick ear caught the sound of a footstep on the high-road.

“It is papa, perhaps,” she said nervously. “O, please go.”

“If you wish it, darling. But I may tell him everything to-morrow, may I not?”

“To-morrow! That is so very sudden.”

“There can be no reason for delay, dearest. Of course our marriage is an event in the future. I am not going to hasten that unduly. Though, as far as worldly matters go, I am in a position to marry to-morrow. But there should be no delay in letting your father know of our engagement.”

“I suppose not. Our engagement! How strange that sounds! Do you really mean it, or will you write me a little

note to-morrow morning recalling your ill-advised expressions of to-night?"

"Such a note is more likely to come from you than from me. But one word, darling. What about this visit to Mrs. Chevenix? It can be put off, can it not, now?"

"I hardly think so; auntie has made all preparations for me."

"They cannot involve much."

"She would be so disappointed, and papa so angry; and there are my expectations, you know. One cannot fly in the face of fortune."

"My wife must be independent of expectations, dear. And London gaieties are not the best preparation for life in a parsonage among the fens."

"Do you think not? I shall find out how hollow and empty such pleasures are, and learn to despise them."

"That is according to circumstances. But as a matter of personal feeling, I would rather you did not go."

"I only wish it were possible to slip out of the engagement; but I don't think it is; aunt Chevenix is so easily offended."

"Offend her then, dear, for once in the way."

Elizabeth shook her head hopelessly. After the money that had been spent upon her dresses it would seem something worse than folly not to wear them. They might have served for her trousseau perhaps, but she doubted if so much flouncing and trimming on the garments of a country clergyman's wife would have satisfied Malcolm Forde's sense of the fitness of things. There was a white tulle ball dress dotted about with tea-roses, a masterpiece of Miss March's which she thought of with a tender regretfulness. O, the dresses ought really to be worn; and what a pity to offend aunt Chevenix for nothing!

"Very well," said Mr. Forde. "I see my tyranny is not to begin yet awhile. If you must go, dear, you must. But it seems rather hard that our betrothal should be inaugurated by a separation."

"It will only be for a few weeks. And I am not going till the end of the month."

The footstep had approached and had passed the Vicarage gate. It was not the step of Mr. Luttrell, but of some bulky farmer walking briskly towards his homestead.

"Good-night, dearest!" said Malcolm Forde, suddenly awakened to the recollection that it was a cold March night, and that Elizabeth was beginning to shiver. "How inconsiderate of me to keep you standing in the open air so long. Shall I take you back to the hall-door?"

"O, no; my sisters might see us, and wonder. I will run round by the orchard, and go in the back-way."

“Very well, dear. They shall have no ground for wonderment after to-morrow. Good-night.”

CHAPTER XIII.

“For Destiny does not like
 To yield to men the helm,
 And shoots his thoughts by hidden nerves
 Throughout the solid realm.
 The patient Dæmon sits
 With roses and a shroud;
 He has his way, and deals his gifts—
 But ours is not allow'd.”

VERY little slumber came to the eyelids of Elizabeth that night. She had spent many a sleepless night of late; nights of tossing to and fro, and weary longing for the late-coming dawn; nights full of thought and wonder about the dim strange future, and what it held for her; nights full of visions of triumphs and pleasures to come, or of sad longing for one dearer delight which was never to be hers—the love of that one man whom she loved.

Very different were her thoughts and visions to-night. He loved her. The one unspeakable blessing which she had for a long time deemed unattainable had dropped into her lap. He loved her, and she had given herself to him for ever and ever. No more vague dreams of the triumphs that were to be won by her beauty, no more half-childish imaginings of pleasures and glories awaiting her in the world she knew not. On the very threshold of that dazzling region, just when success seemed certain, Love closed the gate, and she was to remain without, in the bleaker drearier world she knew, brightened only by that dear companionship.

She had told him that the most dismal home to which he could take her would be a paradise, if shared with him; and she believed that it would be so. Yet being a creature made up of opposites, she could not let the old dream go without a pang.

“From my very childhood I have fancied that something wonderful would happen to me, something as brilliant and unexpected as the fate of Cinderella: and it all ends by my marrying a curate!” she said to herself half wonderingly. “But then he is not like the common herd of curates, he is not like the common herd of mankind. It is an honour to worship him.”

And then by and by she thought:

“I wish I had been a Russian empress, and he my serf. What a delight to have chosen him from his base-born brotherhood,

and placed him beside me upon the throne; to have recognised all that makes him noble, in spite of his surroundings; to have been able to say, 'I give you my heart and soul, and all this northern world'!"

An empress could afford to make a bad match. It was a bad match. Even with all the glamour of this new delight upon her, she did not attempt to disguise this fact.

"I am glad he has money of his own," she mused. "We can at least have a nicely-furnished house—what a comfort to have modern furniture after our ancient rubbish!—and silver like papa's. And I daresay Malcolm will give me money enough to dress nicely, in a simple parson's-wifeish way. I shall have to work very hard in his parish, of course, but it will be for his sake, and that will sweeten everything."

She thought of Lord Paulyn, and smiled to herself at the idea of his disappointment. Now that she had plighted her faith to some one else she felt very sure that the Viscount had been desperately in love with her, and had only waited, with the insolence of rank and wealth, his own good time for telling her of his love. It would be not unamusing, if she met him in London, to lead him on a little, to the point of an offer even, and then crush him by the information that she was 'engaged.' And it would be still more agreeable some day in the happy future, when she was Malcolm Forde's wife, to tell her husband how she had refused a coronet for his sake.

She remembered that foolish wager of her pearl necklace. Diana was welcome to the bauble, and even to any touch of spiteful triumph which she might feel in her sister's acceptance of so humble a destiny. "But they can hardly crow over me if Lord Paulyn makes me an offer, and I refuse him," she said to herself.

Was she not utterly happy in the first flush of her victory, having won the thing she had longed for? Almost utterly, perhaps; but even with the intoxication of that delight there was mingled a vague notion that she had been foolish, that the world—her own small world—would laugh at her. She had carried her head so high, and protested, not once but a hundred times, that, come what might, she would never throw herself away upon a curate. What a storm of anger and ridicule must she needs encounter from Mrs. Chevenix, whenever that worldly-wise matron should be informed of her infatuated conduct? That defiant spirit, which so often had flouted the Chevenix, quailed and shrunk to-night at the thought of the stormy scene that was likely to follow such a revelation.

"But surely I am the mistress of myself," she thought. "It is myself I am giving away. And papa is not up to his eyes in debt, or in danger of dying in a workhouse unless I make a rich

marriage. And if I am a little better-looking than my sisters, and the sort of girl people say ought to make a success in life, is that any reason why I should not be happy my own way, unutterably happy with the man I love so dearly, and to be loved by whom is like the beginning of a new life?"

It will be seen therefore that even in the hour of victory Elizabeth was not unconscious of having thrown herself away. She had been miserable without Mr. Forde's love; but she was quite aware of the price her devotion to him was to cost her. The phantasmal opera-box, and town-house, and country-seats, and carriages, and saddle-horses faded slowly from before her eyes, like a ghostly procession of this world's brightest glories, melting for ever into shadow-land. The worldly half of her soul suffered a pang at parting with these pomps and vanities.

"They do not constitute happiness, I know," she reflected; "but I have thought of them so long as a part of my future life, that it does seem just a little difficult to imagine the future without them."

And then she remembered the dark eyes looking down at hers; the grave low voice speaking words of love, sweeter words than she had ever thought to hear from the lips of Malcolm Forde. She remembered these things, and the pomps and vanities seemed as nothing when weighed against them.

"Thank God that he loves me," she said to herself. "What do I care if other people are disappointed or malicious? I will be happy my own way."

In spite of this resolution she felt strangely nervous next morning at breakfast, when she met the family circle, about which there seemed somehow to be a lurking air of suspicion, though nobody could have reason to suspect. She had slipped quietly in from her nocturnal excursion, and had gone up to her own room unobserved: whence she sent a message to the drawing-room by one of the servants, to the effect that she had a headache, and could not come down to prayers.

"I hope your headache is gone," said Diana, with the lukewarm solicitude of a relative.

"Thanks; yes, I think so."

"A headache is scarcely a subject for thought," remarked Gertrude; "one has or one has not a headache."

"There are such things as nervous headaches," said Elizabeth carelessly.

"Which I have always regarded as another name for affectation," replied Gertrude.

"But you're not eating a crumb of anything, Lizzie," exclaimed Blanche; "and you're so pale, and have such a heavy look about the eyes."

"I did not sleep much last night; and as for breakfast, I have

always considered it a most uninviting meal—perpetual eggs, and rashers, and dry toast, and Dundee marmalade.” Give me another cup of tea, please, Gerty; I am feverishly thirsty. And I am sure, if we are on the subject of looks, I cannot congratulate you on your appearance this morning; you look as if you had been crying half the night.”

Gertrude flushed crimson at this accusation.

“I do not deny that Mr. Forde’s announcement of last night was a blow to me,” she said. “We have worked so long together, and I had learnt to look upon him almost as a brother.”

Elizabeth smiled to herself as she looked into her teacup. She was wondering how Gertrude would like to look upon him quite as a brother; that is to say, as a brother-in-law.

“The idea of his going out as a missionary,” exclaimed Blanche, spreading marmalade on her bread-and-butter. “It sounds Low Church, somehow, to me.”

“I wonder what his successor will be like?” speculated Diana. “Good-looking and gentlemanlike, I trust.”

“And not a horrid man with a herd of brats,” said the flip-pant Blanche.

“Blanche, I do not consider it consistent either with Christian principles or the preservation of your health, to put marmalade on your bread-and-butter to such an extent as you are doing!” said Gertrude, with a housekeeper’s eye to waste.

“I suppose we shall see no more of Mr. Forde till just as he is going away, and then perhaps we shall only get his card with P.P.C. in the corner,” remarked Diana listlessly. She had already begun to put Mr. Forde out of her mind, as a thing of the past.

Elizabeth smiled again, with bent head, a happy triumphant smile. The smile of a heart which held no regret for a possible coronet; a heart which was filled to the very brim with love for Malcolm Forde, and joyful pride for having won him. She was thinking how soon they were likely to see him again, and how often. He was hers now; her vassal. Yes, he, the saint, the demigod, had assumed an earthly bondage. She had talked, in her foolish childish rapture, of being his slave; but she meant to make him hers.

“I wish I could get out of the visit to auntie, as he wishes,” she thought. “If Blanche could go in my place, for instance. But my dress wouldn’t fit Blanche; and perhaps it would be as well for me to see the world a little before I bid good-bye to it, drain the cup of pleasure to the dregs, and find out how vapid the draught is.”

This was an easy way of settling the question; but the fact is that Elizabeth Luttrell, having looked forward during the last four years to the unknown delights of a London season, was

hardly disposed to relinquish so much pleasure, even for the sake of the man she loved better than all the rest of the world. She was a girl who thought she had a right to obtain everything she wished for, and even to serve two masters if she pleased.

She appeared unusually restless during the interval between breakfast and luncheon; wandered out into the garden and orchard, and came back to the house with her hair blown about by the bleak March wind; sat down to the piano, when that instrument was available, and sang a little, and played a little, in her usual desultory manner; took up a book from the table, only to fling it down impatiently five minutes afterwards; and every now and then went to the window, and stood looking absently across the lawn.

"One would suppose you expected somebody, Lizzie," said Diana; "you do fidget so abominably, and stare out of the window so continually."

"You may suppose it, if you like."

"Has Lord Paulyn come back to Ashcombe?"

"I know nothing of his lordship's movements."

"Indeed! I thought he was about the only person in whom you were interested, and I began to think you had received private intelligence, and were on the watch for him."

"I am not on the watch for him, nor do I care if I never see him again."

"What a change! But how about your wager in that case?"

"My wager! what, the pearl necklace, you mean? Of course you knew that was the merest nonsense?"

"What! are you going to back out of it? I thought it was a serious challenge."

"Take the necklace, if you like. I don't think I shall ever wear it and I have other things of poor 'mamma's.'"

"But does that mean that you confess yourself beaten—that you promised more than you feel yourself able to perform?"

"Have it so, if you like. You put me in a passion that night, and I said anything, only to annoy you. But I shall never be Lord Paulyn's wife."

"What a death-blow for poor auntie! She had set her heart upon having a niece in the peerage. Her Debrett would have opened of its own accord—like the book Thackeray speaks of—at the article Paulyn."

The sisters were dawdling over their luncheon, when they heard a footstep on the gravel, and anon a ring at the hall-door. Blanche, the agile, dashed to a window in time to recognise the visitor.

"Now, whoever do you suppose it is, girls?" she cried. "Guess!"

Nobody appeared able to solve the enigma, although Elizabeth's fast-beating heart told her the visitor's name.

"Mr. Forde!" cried Blanche.

"He has come to tell papa, no doubt," said Gertrude, taking a hasty survey of the table, to see that the mid-day meal made a respectable appearance, and then going straightway to the dining-room door, to intercept the visitor. "Papa is in his study, dear Mr. Forde," she said, shaking hands with him; "but do come in first and have a little luncheon.—Blanche, ring for some fresh cutlets."

"No, thank you, Miss Luttrell. I never take any luncheon. And I do particularly want to see the Vicar."

"But I told him everything, and he is so grieved."

"I don't think you can have told quite everything," he answered, with a stolen look at Elizabeth, who was standing just within the doorway, and a little smile, "and I hope we shall be able to overcome his grief. I will go to him at once, and look in upon you young ladies in the drawing-room afterwards."

"Now, remember, we shall expect you," said Gertrude, with her reverential air, hardly sorry that he had been proof against the temptation of the hot cutlet, which had been a somewhat speculative offer; since there might or might not be a section of the 'best end of the neck' in reserve in the larder.

"What delightful manners!" she said, as she went back to her place at the table; "no assumption of goodness, no consciousness of possessing a loftier nature than the common herd."

"Why, you wouldn't have him stalking about in a surplice, or expounding the Scriptures on the doorstep, would you, Gerty?" cried the irreverent Blanche. "I don't see why sinners should be the only people with decent manners."

"Hold your tongue, child; you are incapable of understanding such a nature as his. You can gaze upon that saintly brow without one thrill of emotion."

"I certainly shouldn't offer mutton cutlets to people with saintly brows; I have more sense of the fitness of things," replied the uncrushable youngest.

Elizabeth said nothing. She was subject to long lapses of silence in the company of her sisters. They were so little worth the trouble of conversation. And now she had sweet thoughts that filled her mind while they were babbling,—a new wealth of happiness. He had come to speak to her father, to offer himself as her husband; and afterwards he would come to the drawing-room, and she would know the result.

"Suppose papa should reject him," she thought, with alarm. "I know how aunt Chevenix preached to him about Lord

Paulyn, and the brilliant future before me. But, thank Heaven, papa is not mercenary; so long as he is not disappointed in his dinners, he is sure to take things easily."

The four girls repaired to the drawing-room soon after this, and Gertrude skirmished round the room, making a clearance of litter—books that had been flung down anywhere, work-baskets overturned, flying sheets of music; and having done this, seated herself at her own particular little table, with its neatly-kept Dorcas basket, and began to tear calico. Elizabeth subsided into her favourite chair by the fire, and did nothing after her wont—nothing, except look at the clock on the mantel-piece every now and then, wondering how long the interview would last.

"What a time they are!" Blanche exclaimed at last, with a yawn. "I should have thought, as papa knew all about it, they'd have made shorter work of the business."

"If you would employ yourself, Blanche, you would have less time for idle speculations of that kind," said Gertrude, severely; "but the whole weight of the Dorcas basket is allowed to fall on my shoulders."

"That's the worst of being born too good for this world, my dear Gerty; people are sure to impose upon you."

The door was opened at this moment, and Mr. Forde came in, and crossed the room to Elizabeth's place by the fire, and planted himself on the hearthrug by her side, towering above her as she sat in her low chair, and looking down at her with a tender smile. The sisters stared at him wonderingly. There was an air of appropriation in the manner of his greeting, grave and subdued as it was.

"All has ended happily," he said, in a low voice, as they shook hands. "You will meet with no opposition from your father."

"Have you told papa everything," asked Gertrude, watching the two with jealous eyes.

"Everything."

"And he is very sorry, is he not?"

"A little disappointed, perhaps, but hardly sorry."

"Disappointed, yes, of course. He had hoped you would stay with us at least three years. How I wish he could have persuaded you to change your mind!"

"Suppose I have changed my mind?" said Mr. Forde, smiling at her anxiety. "Suppose I have found an influence powerful enough to make me forego my most cherished ambition?"

"I don't quite understand," faltered Gertrude, looking from him to Elizabeth with a blank dismayed look. "You seemed to have made up your mind so completely last night. What can have happened since then to make you waver?"

"Wonderful things have happened to me since last night. All my thoughts and dreams have undergone a revolution. I have discovered that a life at home can be sweeter to me than I ever dreamed it could be—till last night; and it must be my endeavour to find a useful career for myself at home."

Gertrude grew deadly pale. Yes, she understood it all now. He was looking down at Elizabeth while he spoke—looking down at her with love unspeakable. It was clear enough now. Elizabeth was to have this priceless boon flung into her lap—Elizabeth, who had done nothing to deserve it.

"I want you to accept me as your brother, Gertrude," said Mr. Forde; "and you Diana, and you, Blanche. I mean to do my best to supply the place of the brother you have never had."

"There was the baby," said Blanche, with a matter-of-fact air; "such a poor wee thing!—christened Wilmot Chevenix Trelawney, and died half an hour afterwards. Such a waste of good family names!"

Mr. Forde held out his hand as he made this offer of brotherly affection, but no one took it. Diana gave a little laugh, and got up from her seat to look out of the window. Gertrude stood like a statue, looking at the Curate.

"You seem surprised by my news, Miss Luttrell," he said at last, struck by her singular manner.

"I am more than surprised," said Gertrude, "after the things I have heard my sister say—after some things that you have said yourself, too. However, I suppose one ought never to be surprised at anything in this world. I hope you may be happy, Mr. Forde; but I do not remember ever having heard of so unsuitable a match."

She said this with calm deliberation, having just sufficient self-command to keep the tempest of angry feelings pent up in her breast for the moment; and having delivered herself of this opinion, left the room.

"It will be for us to find out that, won't it, Lizzie?" said the Curate, looking after her wonderingly. "Your eldest sister hardly accepts our new relationship in so pleasant a spirit as I hoped she would have shown towards me."

"Perhaps she wanted you for herself," said Elizabeth, with a scornful laugh. "She has made no secret of worshipping you."

"Diana, Blanche, we are to be good friends, I hope?" This with a kind of appeal to the two others, who this time responded warmly enough.

"Believe me there is no one we could like better than you," said Diana.

"I'm sure we doat upon you," cried Blanche. "I may say it now you are going to be my brother. But, you see, we were taken a little aback at first, for Elizabeth is the beauty of our

family, and there has been so much talk with aunt Chevenix and one and another about the grand marriage she was to make; so it does seem rather a come-down, you know."

"Blanche!" exclaimed Elizabeth furiously.

"Don't I say that we all doat upon him?" expostulated Blanche. "But however good your family may be, you know, Mr. Forde, and however independent your position, and all that kind of thing, a curate isn't a viscount, you know; and after Lord Pauly's attentions——"

"Blanche! If you don't hold your tongue——"

"Don't be angry with her," pleaded Malcolm. "I can forgive Lord Pauly for having admired you, and your family for expecting all mankind to bow down and worship you, so long as you can forgive me for having made you disappoint them."

Diana beheld her with wonder. Had worldly ambition, had a boldly-declared heartlessness come to so poor an end as this? But when Diana and Blanche were alone together presently, Elizabeth having gone into the garden to see her lover off, with a rapid appropriation of her rights as his affianced, the younger sister shook her head sagely.

"How blind you must be, Di!" she said. "I knew all about it ever so long ago. She was always madly in love with him. I have heard her say such things!"

"I used to fancy she liked him a little once, but I thought Lord Pauly had put all that out of her head, and that she had set her heart upon becoming a viscountess."

"Elizabeth is a mixture," said Blanche sententiously; "one moment the most mercenary being in the world, and the next like that classic party, with a name something like Sophia, ready to throw herself off a rock for love. It'll be rather nice, though, to have Mr. Forde for a brother, won't it, Di?"

"It would have been nicer to have had a viscount," responded Diana.

In the bleak garden once more, the March winds buffeting them, the daffodils waving at their feet, the world a paradise.

"Was papa very much surprised?" inquired Elizabeth.

"Yes, darling; more surprised than I had expected to find him, for he had evidently learned to consider Lord Pauly almost your plighted lover."

"How absurd!" cried the girl with a little toss of her head; "such an idea would never have entered papa's mind of itself. He is not a person to have ideas. But aunt Chevenix talked such rubbish, just because Lord Pauly came here a good deal. I suppose this was about the only place he had to come to, on the days he didn't hunt."

"I think there would be a few more houses open to him within

a radius of ten miles, although he does not bear a very high character," said Mr. Forde gravely.

"Perhaps. However he seemed to like coming here," replied Elizabeth carelessly. "I am sorry he has not a good character, for he is not at all a bad-natured young man, although one is apt to get tired of his society after an hour or so. You are not going to be jealous of him, I hope?"

"I should be very jealous of any farther friendship, of any farther acquaintance even, between him and my future wife. He is not a good man, believe me, Elizabeth. There are things I cannot possibly tell you, but he is known to have led a bad life. I think you must know that I am not a collector of scandal, but his character is notorious."

"You were jealous of him that Sunday at lunch, Malcolm," she said in her childish way, clinging to his arm with a timid fondness. "I saw you scowling at us, and I was prouder of your anger than I was of his admiration; and then you kept away, and I saw no more of you for ages, and I thought you a monster of coldness and cruelty."

"Yes, dear, I was savagely jealous; and O, my darling, promise me that there shall be no more intimacy between that man and you. I hate the idea of this visit to your aunt's, for that reason above all. You will meet him in town, perhaps; you will have aunt Chevenix by your side, dropping her worldly poison into your ear. Will you be deaf to all her arguments? Will you be true and pure and noble in spite of her?"

"I will be nothing that you disapprove," said Elizabeth; and then with a little burst of truthfulness she went on, "Do trust me, Malcolm. I only want just one little peep at the world before I bid it good-bye for ever—the world about which I have dreamed so much. It will be only for a few weeks."

"Very well, dear, I will trust you. If you could not pass scatheless through such an ordeal, you would be hardly worthy of an honest man's love. My dearest treasure, I will hazard you. I think I can trust you, Elizabeth. But if you cannot come back to me pure and true, for God's sake let me never look upon your face again."

Book the Second.

CHAPTER I.

“Two souls, alas, dwell in my breast: the one struggles to separate itself from the other. The one clings with obstinate fondness to the world, with organs like cramps of steel; the other lifts itself majestically from the mist to the realms of an exalted ancestry.”

A SUNNY afternoon in the second week of May, one of those brilliant spring days which cheat the dweller in cities, who has no indications of the year's progress around and about him—no fields of newly-sprouting corn, or hedges where the black-thorn shows silvery-white above grassy banks dappled with violets and primroses—into the belief that summer is at hand. The citizen has no succession of field birds to serve for his time-keepers, but he hears canaries and piping bullfinches carolling in balconies, perhaps sees a flower-girl at a street-corner, and begins to think he is in the month of roses.

It seemed the month of roses in one small drawing-room in Eaton-place-south—a back drawing-room and of the tiniest, with a fernery of dark green glass, artfully contrived to shed a dim religious light upon the chamber, and at the same time mask the view of an adjacent mews—the daintiest possible thing in the way of back drawing-rooms, furnished with chairs and dwarf couches of the *pouff* species, covered with cream-coloured cretonne and befrilled muslin; a coffee-table or two in convenient corners; the clock on the maroon-velvet-covered mantel-piece, a chubby Cupid in turquoise Sèvres beating a drum; the candelabra, two other chubby blue bantlings struggling under their burden of wax-candles; curtains of maroon velvet and old Flemish lace half screening the fire in the low steel grate—Enscenced in the most luxurious of the *pouffs*, with her feet on the tapestried fender-stool (a joint labour of the four Luttrell girls), and a large green fan between her face and the glow, sat Elizabeth Luttrell. She was not alone. Aunt Chevenix was writing letters at her davenport in the front drawing-room; the swift flight of her quill pen might be heard ever and anon in the rearward chamber; and Reginald Paulyn was sitting *à cheval* upon a smaller *pouff*, rocking himself to and fro, to the endangerment of the castors, as he discoursed.

“Come now, Miss Luttrell, I want you to like Mrs. Cinqmars,” he said, in an argumentative tone. “She may not be quite what you'd call good style——”

“I know very little of good or bad style,” interrupted Elizabeth, in a somewhat contemptuous tone; “your world is so new to me. But certainly Mrs. Cinqmars has hardly what that

French secretary of legation I went in to dinner with the other night called *l'air du faubourg*."

"Well, no, perhaps not; dresses a little too much, and indulges rather too freely in slang, perhaps. But she's the most kind-hearted creature in the world; gives the best parties out—not your high-and-mighty nine o'clock dinners, with cabinet ministers and ambassadors and foreign princelings, and so forth, but carpet dances, and acting charades, and impromptu suppers, and water parties. You go to her house to amuse yourself, in short, and not to do the civil to a lot of elderly fogies with orders at their button-holes, or to talk politics with some heavy swell whose name is always cropping up in the *Times* leaders."

"Who is Mr. Cinqmars?" inquired Elizabeth with a supercilious air.

"Henri du Châtelet de Cinqmars. Born a Belgian, of a French-Canadian father and an English mother—that's his nationality. Made his money upon various stock exchanges, and continues so to make it, only extending his operations now and then by buying up a steamboat line, or something in that way. A man who will burst up some of these days, no doubt, and pay ninepence or so in the pound; but in the mean time he lives very decently at the rate of twenty thousand a year. He has literary proclivities, too, and is editor and proprietor of the *Ring*, a weekly paper in the sporting and theatrical interests, with a mild flavour of the *Age* and the *Satirist*, which you may or may not have seen."

"I never look at newspapers," said Elizabeth; "but pray why are you so anxious that I should like your Mrs. du Châtelet de Cinqmars?" she asked, lowering her fan and gratifying the Viscount with an inquiring gaze from her brilliant eyes, more than ever brilliant since she had drunk the sparkling cup of London pleasures.

"Because she's the nicest person you could possibly have for a chaperon. Ah, of course, I know," answering her glance in the direction of the busy letter-writer, whose substantial form was visible in the distance; "your aunt is a plucky old party, and can stand a good deal of knocking about for a veteran, but I think she'd knock under if she tried Mrs. Cinqmars' work: that blessed little woman shows up at every race in Great Britain—from Pontefract to the Curragh—and at every regatta; and in the autumn you find her at Hombourg or Baden, gambling like old boots. Now, if you would only put yourself under her wing," concluded Lord Paulyn persuasively, "you'd stand some chance of seeing life."

"Thank you very much; but I think I have seen enough in the last five weeks to last me for the remainder of my existence.

Mrs. Cinqmars is a most good-natured person, no doubt; she called me 'my dear' half an hour after I'd been introduced to her; and I won't be so rude as to say that she's not good style; but she's not my style, and I shouldn't care about knowing her more intimately. Besides, papa wants me at home, and I am really anxious to go back."

She smiled to herself with a pensive smile; thinking what reason she had for this anxiety; thinking of the quiet country town, the gray old Norman church, with its wide aisles and ponderous square tower—the church along whose bare arched roof Malcolm Forde's deep voice echoed resonantly; thinking of that widely-different life, with its sluggish calm, and that it would be very sweet to go back to it, now that life at Hawleigh meant happy triumphant love, and Malcolm for her bond-slave.

But, in the mean time, this other and more mundane existence, with its picture-galleries, and gardens botanical or horticultural putting forth their first floral efforts, its dinners and déjeuners and kettle-drums and carpet dances, was something more than tolerable to the soul of Elizabeth. She had made a success in her aunt's circle, which was by no means a narrow one, and had received adulation enough to turn a stronger brain; had found the cup of pleasure filled to overflowing, and new worshippers everywhere she appeared. Had Mrs. Chevenix been a step or two higher on the nicely-graduated platform of society, Miss Luttrell might have been the belle of the season; as it was, people talked of her as the beautiful Miss Luttrell, a country clergyman's daughter, a mere nobody, but a nobody whom it was a solecism not to have met.

She accepted this homage with an air of calm indifference, something bordering even upon arrogance or superciliousness, which told well for her; but in her secret soul she absorbed the praises of mankind greedily.

She showed herself an adept in the art of flirtation, and had given so much apparent encouragement to Lord Paulyn, that, although she had been only five weeks in town, her engagement to that young nobleman was already an established fact in the minds of people who had seen them together. But she was not the less constant to her absent lover; not the less eager for his brief but earnest letters. She looked forward to her future without a pang of regret—with rapturous anticipation, rather, of a little heaven upon earth with the man she adored. But she thought at the same time that her chosen husband was a peculiarly privileged being, and that he had need to rejoice with a measureless joy in having won so rare a prize.

"If he could see the attention I receive here, he might think it almost strange that I should love him better than all the rest of the world," she said to herself.

"Going back to Hawleigh!" cried Lord Paulyn aghast. "Why, you mustn't dream of such a thing till after the Goodwood week! I have set my heart on showing you Goodwood."

"What is Goodwood?" asked Elizabeth, thinking it might be some new kind of game—an improvement upon croquet perhaps; "and when is the Goodwood week?"

"Towards the end of July."

"In July; that would never do. I must go home in a fortnight at the latest."

"Why, your aunt told me you were coming up for the season!"

"My aunt had no right to say anything of the kind."

"O, but it's positively absurd," exclaimed the Viscount, "going back just when there'll be most people in town, and to such a dingy old hole as Hawleigh. What possible necessity can there be for your returning? Mr. Luttrell has your three sisters to take care of him. He'll do well enough, I should think."

"O, yes, I daresay he will get on very well," said Elizabeth, thinking of another person who had written lately to inquire, rather seriously, whether the few weeks were not nearly over, whether she had not had ample time already for a brief survey of a world whose pomps and vanities she was going to renounce for ever, only thereby conforming to the pious promises of her godfathers and godmothers, which her own lips had ratified at her confirmation.

"Come, now," said Lord Paulyn, returning to the charge, "do let me arrange an alliance between you and Mrs. Cinqmars. She's just the kind of person with whom you could enjoy yourself. She has a box on the grand-stand at Epsom and Ascot every year—I shouldn't wonder if she had bought the freehold of them—and always takes a brace of pretty girls with her. If you would only let her drive you down to the Derby now, to-morrow week, I'll be responsible for your having a delightful day; and I'll be in attendance to show you everything and everybody worth seeing."

"Thanks. I don't think my aunt cares for Mrs. Cinqmars."

"Your aunt is about a century behind the times; but perhaps Flora—Mrs. C.—hasn't been civil enough to her. Let me drive you and Mrs. Chevenix down to Fulham this afternoon. Tuesday's her day for receiving, and you'll see no end of nice people there. I'll send my groom for the drag, and take you through the Park in good style."

A four-in-hand seemed to Elizabeth the glory and triumph of the age; and there was nothing particular in the Eaton-place programme for this afternoon.

"I should like it very well," she said, brightening, "if auntie would consent."

"O, I'll soon settle that," replied Lord Paulyn, rising from his *pouff*, and going into the next room.

Mrs. Chevenix, after a little diplomatic hesitation, consented to everything except the drag.

"No young lady, with a proper regard for her reputation, can ride on the box-seat of a four-in-hand, unless the coachman is her brother or her husband."

"I am very glad I'm not the first, in this case," said Lord Paulyn; "and I certainly mean to be the second, if I can."

These were the plainest words the Viscount had yet spoken, and they moved the spirit of aunt Chevenix with exceeding joy, albeit she knew that her niece was engaged to Mr. Forde.

"If you really wish us to visit Mrs. Cinqmars—and you know, dear Lord Paulyn, there is very little I would not do to oblige you," she said, with a maternal air—"I'll take Lizzie down to the Rancho in the brougham, and you can join us there if you like. Mrs. Cinqmars has called upon me several times, and I have not returned her visits. She seems a very good-natured little person; but, you see, I am getting an old woman, and don't care much about cultivating new acquaintance."

Thus Mrs. Chevenix, who would have run herself into a fever in the pursuit of an unknown countess.

Lord Paulyn waived the question of the drag regretfully.

"My horses haven't been as fit as they are to-day since they came from grass," he said, "but I'll drive down alone. What time will you start? It's just four; Mrs. Cinqmars is always in full force from five to six."

"If you'll be kind enough to ring the bell, I'll order the carriage for a quarter to five. I shall have time to dress after I've finished my letters for the general post."

"Can't think how any one can write letters, now we've got the telegraph," said Lord Paulyn, staring in amazement at aunt Chevenix's bulky despatches; "I always wire."

"But if you were in love, and separated from the object of your affection?" suggested Mrs. Chevenix, smiling.

"I should wire: or if I had something uncommonly spooney to say, I might spell it backwards in the second column of the *Times*. I don't know how to write a letter: indeed, I'm not at all clear that I haven't forgotten how to write long-hand altogether. I keep my betting-book in cipher; and when I send a telegram, I always dictate the message to the post-office clerk."

"But I should have thought now, with respect to your race-horses, the telegraph system might be dangerous. There are things you want to keep dark, as you call it, are there not?"

"Of course there are. But we've got our code, my trainer and I, and I've private names for every brute in my stable.

Got a message this morning: "Bryant and May taken to the bassoon." By which I know that Vesuvian, a two-year-old I was backing for next year, has been run out of her wind in some confounded trial, and is musical."

"Musical!"

"Yes, ma'am; a roarer, if you want it in plain English."

"Dear me, how provoking!" said Mrs. Chevenix, with a sympathetic countenance, but with not the faintest idea what the Viscount meant.

Elizabeth consented to the Rancho business languidly.

"I'd rather stay at home and finish my novel," she said, looking at an open novel lying on one of the *pouffs*. "You can't imagine what an exciting chapter you interrupted, Lord Paulyn; but of course I shall go if auntie likes. Auntie has such an insatiable appetite for society."

Mrs. Chevenix raised her eyebrows, and regarded her niece with admiring wonder. "Who would ever imagine the child had been reared in a Devonshire vicarage!" she exclaimed, as Elizabeth sat fanning herself, an image of listless grace.

"Who would have supposed Venus came out of the sea!" replied the Viscount. "She didn't look weedy, or sandy, or shell-fishy, that ever I heard of; but came up smiling, with her hair combed out as neatly as the tails and manes of my fillies. And as to rustic bringing up, there was that young woman in the play—Lady Teazle, you know. See how she carried on."

The Viscount departed after this, happy in the prospect of meeting Elizabeth an hour later in the happy hunting-grounds of the Rancho, perhaps the best field for flirtation within three miles of Hyde-park-corner.

"Elizabeth," exclaimed Mrs. Chevenix, when they were alone, with an air of almost awful solemnity, "there is a coronet lying at your feet, if you have only the wisdom to pick it up. I am not going to make any complaint, or to express my opinions, or to say anything in disparagement of *that person*. I have kept my feelings upon *that* subject locked within my breast, at any cost of pain to myself. But if, when you have looked around you, and seen what the world is made of, you can be so infatuated as to persist in your mad course, I can only pity you."

"Don't take the trouble to do that, auntie. I can imagine no higher happiness than that which I have chosen. A coronet is a grand thing, of course, with all the other things that go along with it. I am not going to pretend that I don't care for the world and its pleasures. I do care for them. I have enjoyed my life in the last three weeks more than I thought it possible that life could be enjoyed. I fear that I have an infinite capacity for frivolity. And yet I shall be proud to surrender all these things for the love of the man I have chosen."

"The man you have chosen!" repeated Mrs. Chevenix, with a shiver. "My dearest Lizzie, is there not a shade of indelicacy in the very phrase?"

"I can't help that," answered Elizabeth coolly; "I know that I did choose him. I chose him out from all creation for the lord of my life, worshipped him in secret when I thought he was indifferent to me; should have died of a broken heart, I believe, or at any rate of mortification and disappointment, if he had never returned my love."

This was a bold declaration intended to extinguish aunt Chevenix at once and for ever.

"My poor child," said the matron, shaking her head with a deploring air, "I am inexpressibly grieved to hear you speak in that wild manner of such a person as your father's curate. A man in that position cannot afford to be loved in that exaggerated way. A *grande passion* is out of keeping among people with limited incomes and their career to make in the world. With people of established position it is different, of course; and though I might smile at such an infatuation, were you to entertain it for Lord Paulyn, I could hardly disapprove. You and he would be as far removed from the vulgar herd of engaged persons as a prince and princess in a fairy tale, and might safely indulge in some little extravagance."

"You need fear very little extravagance on my part if Lord Paulyn were my accepted lover," answered Elizabeth, with a cynical laugh. "Imagine any one mated to that prosaic being, with his slang and his stable talk!"

"In spite of those small drawbacks—which, after all, are natural to his youth and open-hearted disposition—I believe him to be capable of a most devoted attachment. I have seen him gaze at you, Elizabeth, in a way that made my blood run cold when I considered that you were capable of trampling upon such a heart for the sake of a Scotch curate. However, I will say nothing," concluded Mrs. Chevenix with heroism, after having said all she wanted to say.

In half-an-hour the two ladies were dressed, and on their way to Fulham; Elizabeth enveloped in a fleecy cloud of whiteness, with gleams of lustrous mauve here and there among her drapery, and a mauve feather in her white-chip hat, gloves faultless, parasol a gem: a toilet whose finishing touches had been furnished by the well-filled purse of Mrs. Chevenix. The matron herself was resplendent in bronze silk, and an imposing blue bonnet. They had put on their richest armour for the encounter with Mrs. Cinqmars, a lady who spent her life in trying to dress-down her acquaintance.

CHAPTER II.

“Applause

Waits on success ; the fickle multitude,
Like the light straw that floats along the stream,
Glide with the current still, and follow fortune.”

FULHAM is a neighbourhood of infinite capabilities. It is almost impossible to know the ultimate boundaries of a region to which nature seems to have hardly yet assigned any limit ; from squalid streets of six-roomed houses, to splendid places surrounded by park-like grounds ; from cemeteries and market-gardens—bare expanses of asparagus or turnips, where the atmosphere is rank with decaying garden stuffs—to arenas reserved for the competition of the fleet-footed and strong-armed of our modern youth, and to shady groves dedicated to the slaughter of the harmless pigeon ; from newly-built red-brick mansions hiding themselves coyly within high walls, and darkened by the shade of immemorial cedars. Fulham has stomach for them all. Queer little lanes still lead the explorer to unknown (or at least to him unknown) tracts of inland country ; and on that wild shore between the bridges of Putney and Hammersmith there are far-spreading gardens and green lawns which a worldly-minded person might long for as the paradise of his departed soul.

The Rancho was one of these places by the river ; a house and grounds which, after belonging to a titled owner, had sunk to gradual decay under undistinguished and incapable tenants ; and, at last, coming into the market for a larger price than speculators were inclined to give, had, after hanging on hand for a long time, been finally bought a dead bargain by Mr. Cinqmars.

This gentleman, being amply provided with funds—whether his own or other people’s was, of course, a minor question—and being, moreover, blessed with a wife who had a taste, set to work to remodel the house, which was old and not capacious, and altogether in that condition in which it is cheaper to pull down than to rebuild. Mr. Cinqmars, however, left the lower reception rooms, which were fine, almost untouched, only widening the windows in the drawing-room to the whole width of the room, and putting a glass roof to the billiard-room, which could be replaced by an awning in warm weather, or thrown open to the sky on starlit summer nights. On each side of these central rooms he built a commodious wing, in rustic wood-work, after the model of a Mexican farmhouse in which he had once spent a week during his travels. All round the house he put a wooden verandah, ten feet wide, and paved with cool blue and cream-

coloured tiles; and having done this he furnished all the rooms in the purest rustic fashion—with light woods; pastoral chintzes scattered with violets and primroses; no draperies to the windows, which were amply shaded by Venetian blinds within and Spanish hoods without; very few carpets, but oak floors polished to distraction, and Indian matting in the passages. It was a house that was built apparently for eternal summer, but was yet so contrived as to be extremely comfortable when March winds were howling round the verandah, or an April snowstorm drifting against the glass roof of the billiard-room. On a real summer's day it was distractingly delightful; and to return from its light and airy chambers to the dingy square rooms of a London house—a mere packing-case set upon end in a row of other packing-cases—was not conducive to the preservation of a contented mind.

But Mr. and Mrs. Cinqmars were people who could not have lived in a house that was not better than everybody else's house. They were people who lived upon their surroundings; their surroundings were themselves, as it were. If anybody asked who Mr. Cinqmars was, his friends and admirers plunged at once into a glowing description of the Rancho, or demanded with an air of amazement how it came to pass you had not seen his horses in the park—high-stepping bays, with brass-mounted harness. There was a place in Scotland too, which Mr. Cinqmars spoke of somewhat vaguely, and which might be anything, from half a county down to half-a-dozen acres. He was in the habit of promising his acquaintance good shooting on that domain; but in the hurry and pressure of modern life these promises are rarely fulfilled. Every man's autumn is mortgaged before the spring is over; there is nothing safer than a liberal dealing out of general invitations in June or July.

Mrs. Cinqmars was at home every Tuesday throughout the London season, and to be at home with Mrs. Cinqmars meant a great deal. The grounds of the Rancho were simply perfect—ancient gardens, with broad lawns gently sloping to the water; lawns whose deep and tender herbage had been cultivated for ages; forest trees which shut out the world on every side except that noble curve of the river which made a shallow bay before the windows of the Rancho; cedars of Lebanon spreading their dusky branches wide above the shadowy sward. Mrs. Cinqmars did not to any great extent affect gaudy flower-beds—parallelograms of scarlet geranium and calceolaria, silver-gray leafage, and potting-out plants of the pickling-cabbage order—or ribbon bordering. Are not these things common to all the world? Instead of these, she had masses of rough stonework and young forests of fern in the shady corners of her grounds, and a regiment of century-old orange-trees in

great green tubs, ranged along a broad walk leading down to the river. Her grounds were shady realms of greenery, rather than showy parterres. She had her hot-houses and forcing-pits somewhere in the background, and all her rooms were adorned to profusion with the choicest flowers; but only in the rose season was there much display of colour in the gardens of the Rancho. Then, indeed, Mrs. Cinqmars' lawn was as some fertile valley in Cashmere, and the very atmosphere which Mrs. Cinqmars inhaled was heavy with the odours of all the noblest and choicest families among the rose tribe—arcades of roses, roses climbing skyward upon iron rods, temples that looked like gigantic birdcages overrun with roses, roses everywhere—for a brief season of glory and delight, the season of fresh strawberry ices, and mature but not overgrown whitebait.

On these her days, Mrs. Cinqmars kept open house from five o'clock upwards. There was a great dinner later in the evening, but by no means a formal banquet, for the men who came in morning dress to lounge remained to dine; mature matrons, whose bonnets were as things immovable, were permitted to dine in that kind of headgear; there was a general air of Bohemianism about the Rancho; billiards were played till the summer daylight; the sound of cabs and phaetons, dog-carts and single broughams, startled the slumbering echoes in the Fulham lanes between midnight and sunrise; the goddess of pleasure was worshipped in a thorough-going unqualified manner, as intense as the devotion which inspired human sacrifices on the shrine of moonèd Ashtaroth.

In fine weather, when the sun was bright and the air balmy, and only occasional shivers reminded happy idlers that an English climate is treacherous, Mrs. Cinqmars delighted to receive her friends in the garden. Innumerable arm-chairs of foreign basket-work were to be found in snug little corners of the grounds; tiny tables were ready for the accommodation of teacups or ice-plates. Champagne and claret-cup were as bounteously provided as if those beverages had been running streams, watering the velvet lawns and meandering through the groves of the Rancho. Wenham's clear ice was as plentiful as if the Thames had been one solid block from Thames to Nore. There was no croquet. In this, as in the flower-beds, Mrs. Cinqmars had been forestalled by all the world. But as a substitute for this universal recreation, Mrs. Cinqmars had imported all manner of curious games upon queer little tables with wiry mazes, and bells and balls, at which a good deal of money and a still larger amount of the manufacture of Piver or Jouvin were lost and won on that lady's Tuesdays. The châtelaine herself even was not insensible to the offerings of gloves; she had indeed an insatiable appetite for that com-

modity, and absorbed so many packets of apricot and lavender treble buttons from her numerous admirers, that it might be supposed that her husband, while lavishing upon her every other luxury, altogether denied her these emblems of civilisation. But as Mrs. Cinqmars was never seen in a glove which appeared to have been worn more than half-an-hour, it may be fairly imagined that her consumption of the article was large. Taking a moderate view of the case, and supposing that she wore only three pairs per diem, she would require more than a thousand pairs per annum, and this last straw in the expenses of her sumptuous toilet may have broken Mr. Cinqmars' back. However this might be, Mrs. Cinqmars was singularly successful in all these small games of chance, tempered by skill, and did a good deal of ladylike speculation upon various races into the bargain, whereby the glove-boxes, not paltry toys made to hold half-a-dozen or so, but huge caskets of carved sandal wood, with partitions for the divers colours, were never empty. Young men were seen approaching her through the groves of the Rancho armed with dainty oblong packages, their humble tribute to the goddess of the grove, tribute which she received with a business-like coolness, as her due. There were malicious people who hinted that Mrs. Cinqmars was not inaccessible to larger offerings; that diamond bracelets, ruby crosses, emerald ear-rings, which were not the gifts of her husband, had found their way to her jewel-cases; but as Mr. Cinqmars was exorbitantly rich, this was of course a fabrication. Only there is an order of goddesses somewhat insatiable in the matter of tribute; goddesses who, on being suddenly possessed of the Koh-i-noor, would that instant languish for the Star of the South, as a pendant thereto.

Upon this particular afternoon in May the air was balmy, and the sun unseasonably warm, for it is only the fond believer in idyllic poets who expects genial weather in May; and the grounds of the Rancho were gay with visitors, brightly-costumed groups scattered here and there in the shade; a perpetual crowd hovering about the footsteps of Mrs. Cinqmars as she moved to and fro among her guests, so delighted to see every one; a cheerful chatter of many voices, and a musical jingle of tea-spoons mildly suggestive of refreshment.

Mrs. Cinqmars was a little woman, with intensely-black eyes and long black hair—hair which she wore down her back, after the fashion of a horse's tail, and which reached ever so far below her waist—hair which she delighted to tie with bright-coloured ribbons. She was a woman who affected brilliant colours, and as she flashed here and there amidst the greenery, had something the air of a gorgeous paraquito from some far southern isle.

Her hair and her eyes were her strong points, and to come within the range of those tremendous orbs was like facing a battery of Lancastrians. They dealt ruin across the open country, bringing down their quarry at terrific distance. To be able to stand the blaze of Mrs. Cinqmars' eyes, was to be case-hardened, tried in the fire of half-a-dozen London seasons. For the rest, she was hardly to be called a pretty woman. Her complexion was sallow; and as she wished to have the freehold and not a short lease of whatever beauty she possessed, she was wise enough to refrain from the famous arts of our modern Medea, Madame Rachel Levison. Her small hands and feet, coquettish costumes, brilliant eyes, and luxuriant hair, she considered all-sufficient for the subjugation of mankind.

She received Mrs. Chevenix and her niece with effusion: so kind of them to come, and so on. And she really was glad to see them. They belonged to a class which she was peculiarly desirous to cultivate, the eminently respectable—not that she for her own part liked this order of beings, or would for worlds have had her parties composed of such alone; but a little leaven might leaven the whole lump, and Mrs. Cinqmars was quite aware that the mass of her society did require such leavening. Not that Mrs. Cinqmars was herself in any manner disreputable. She had never been accused of carrying a flirtation beyond the limits which society has prescribed for a young matron; she was known to be devoted to her husband and her husband's interests; and yet the friends and flatterers she gathered around her were not the choicest fruit in the basket; they were rather those ever-so-slightly-speckled peaches which only fetch a secondary price in the market. The class with which Mr. Cinqmars shared the glories of his wealth and state was that class which seems by some natural affinity to ally itself with the wealthy parvenu—second-rate authors, newspaper men, and painters, fastish noblemen, military men with a passion for amateur theatricals, and so on; *toute la boutique*, as Mrs. Cinqmars observed.

Mr. Cinqmars had a two-hundred-ton yacht of notorious speed and sailing capacity, which assisted him in the cultivation of youthful scions of the aristocracy, whose presence imparted a grace to the dinner-parties and kettledrums at the Rancho; but it happened, unfortunately, that the youthful scions were for the most part impecunious, and did not materially advance Du Châtelet's interests. It was not often that Mr. and Mrs. Cinqmars were so fortunate as to cultivate such an acquaintance as Lord Paulyn, and the friendship of that wealthy nobleman had been a source of much gratification to both husband and wife. Reginald Paulyn liked the easy-going style of the Rancho; liked to feel himself a god in that peculiar

circle; liked to be able to flirt with agreeable young women who were not perpetually beneath the piercing eye of a calculating parent or guardian, to flirt a little even, in a strictly honourable manner, with Mrs. Cinqmars herself; to play billiards till the summer stars grew pale, or to gamble in moonlit groves where the little bells on the be-wired and be-numbered boards tinkled merrily under the silent night. Lord Paulyn liked to enjoy himself without paying any tax in the shape of ceremony, and the Rancho offered him just this kind of enjoyment. He, too, had his yacht, the Pixy; so there was sympathy between him and the adventurous Du Châtelet, who had crossed the Atlantic in a half-decked pinnace of thirty tons, and discovered the source of the Nile for his own amusement, before any of the more distinguished explorers who have made themselves known to fame, according to his own account of his various and interesting career.

“I like the Rancho, you know,” the Viscount would remark to his friends, with a condescending air; “it’s like a little bit of Hombourg on the banks of the Thames; and Cinqmars isn’t half a bad fellow—a little loud of course, you know; and so is Mrs. C.; and one needn’t believe a large percentage of what either of ’em says. But I rather like that kind of thing; one gets surfeited with good manners in the season.”

To these happy hunting-grounds, the Viscount was peculiarly desirous to introduce Elizabeth. It was all very well calling three or four times a week in Eaton-place, and whiling away a couple of hours under the eye, or within reach of the ear, of Mrs. Chevenix; but the lover’s soul languished for a closer communion than this, for *tête-à-tête* rambles under the forest-trees of Fulham; for a snug little corner on board Mr. Cinqmars’ barge, when she gave her great water-parties up the river, between Hampton lock and Henley; for waltzes in the rustic drawing-room, where half-a-dozen couples were wont to have the floor to themselves late in the night after the Cinqmars’ dinners. The Viscount’s chances of meeting his beloved in society were not numerous. His circle was not Mrs. Chevenix’s circle, and it annoyed him to hear of dinners and balls to which Elizabeth was going, the dinners of wealthy professional men or commercial magnates, just outside the boundary of his patrician world. The Rancho offered an open field for their frequent meeting, and it was for this reason that the Viscount desired to bring about an alliance between Elizabeth and Mrs. Cinqmars.

Miss Luttrell accepted the lady’s enthusiastic welcome with her usual coolness, and allowed her aunt to descant alone upon the charms of the Rancho grounds, and her astonishment at finding so large a domain on the very edge of London. Lord

Paulyn had arrived before them, and was ready to carry off Elizabeth at once to explore the beauties of the place.

"I know you're fond of old trees," he said, "and you must see Mrs. Cinqmars' cedars."

Flora Cinqmars looked after the two with an air of enlightenment. So Lord Paulyn was sweet upon that handsome Devonshire girl people talked so much about. The discovery was not an agreeable one. Mrs. Cinqmars liked her friends best when their affections were disengaged; and no doubt, if Lord Paulyn married, there would be an end of an acquaintance which had been very useful to her. She was not, however, an ill-natured person, so she gave her graceful shoulders a careless little shrug, and resigned herself to the inevitable.

"I suppose I had better be civil to the girl," she thought; "and if he cuts us after he is married, I can't help it. But perhaps he'll hardly do that if he marries a parson's daughter, though he might if he took up with some heavy swell, who'd run her pen through the list of his bachelor acquaintances, and put her veto on all the nicest people."

Elizabeth found Mrs. Cinqmars' afternoon by no means disagreeable. There were plenty of pleasant people and well-dressed people, a few eccentric toilets, *pour se divertir*, a good many people with a certain kind of literary or artistic distinction, a mere effervescence of the hour perhaps,—a temporary sparkle, which would leave them as flat as yesterday's unfinished bottles of champagne by next season, but which for the moment made them worth seeing. Then there were the grounds, pink and white horse-chestnuts in their Whitsuntide glory, and the river running swiftly downward under the westering sun.

Lord Paulyn tried his uttermost to keep Elizabeth to himself; to beguile her into lonely walks where he could pour forth the emotions of his soul, which did not express themselves in a particularly poetical manner at the best of times; but Elizabeth was anxious to see the celebrities, and a good many people were anxious to see her, as a celebrity in her own peculiar line, by reason of her beauty; so Lord Paulyn was thwarted in this desire, and was fain to be content with keeping his place at her side, whether she sat or walked, against all comers.

"I never do seem able to get five minutes' quiet talk with you," he said at last, almost savagely, when Mrs. Chevenix had joined them, and was talking of going back to town.

"I really cannot imagine what you can have to say that can't quite as well be said in a crowd as in solitude," answered Elizabeth coldly.

She gave him these little checks occasionally, not quite forgetting that she was the plighted wife of another man—a fact which she had begged her aunt to tell Lord Paulyn, and which

she fondly supposed had been imparted to him. Secure in the idea that the Viscount had been made acquainted with her position, or at any rate serenely indifferent to that gentleman's feelings, she enjoyed her new life, and permitted his attentions with a charming carelessness, as if he had been of little more account than an affectionate Skye terrier. It was one of the prerogatives of her beauty to be admired, and she was worldly-wise enough to know that her position in her aunt's circle was wondrously enhanced by Lord Paulyn's very evident subjugation. He had as yet neither committed himself, nor alarmed her by any direct avowal; she had taken care to keep him so completely at bay as to prevent such a crisis.

And even in the midst of all these pleasures and excitements, in this atmosphere of adulation, her heart did yearn for the lover from whom she was parted; for the light of those dark steadfast eyes; the grasp of that strong hand, whose touch thrilled her soul; for the sound of that earnest voice, whose commonest word was sweeter than all other utterances upon this earth. She did think of him; yes, in the very press and hurry of her new life, and still more deeply in every chance moment of repose—even to-day under those wide-spreading chestnuts, beside that sunlit river. How doubly, trebly, unutterably sweet this life would have been could she but have shared it with him!

"If some good fairy would change the positions of these two men," she thought childishly, "and make Malcolm Lord Paulyn, what a happy creature I should be!"

And then she was angry with herself for thinking so base a thought. Had she not won much more than the world in winning him?

"He knows that I am not good, that I am just the very last of women he ought to have chosen, and yet he loves me. I am proud to think of that. I should have hardly valued his love if he had only chosen me because I was good and proper, and a suitable person for his wife," she argued with herself.

Mrs. Cinqmars entreated her new friends to stay to dinner. There were a great many people going to stay, really pleasant people. Mr. Burjoyce the fashionable novelist, and Mr. Macduff the Scotch landscape painter, whose Ben Lomond was one of the pictures of the year; and Lord Paulyn had promised to stay if Mrs. Chevenix and Miss Luttrell would stay, whereby it would be peculiarly cruel of them to depart. But Mrs. Chevenix was inflexible; she was not going to make herself cheap in society which she felt to be second-rate, however cool the champagne cup, however soft the sward on which she trod.

"You are very good," she said; "but it is quite impossible. We have engagements for this evening."

Lord Paulyn hereupon began to talk of the Derby.

“I want to get up a party, Mrs. Cinqmars,” he said, “or you shall get it up if you like, as you’re a top-sawyer at that kind of thing. Suppose I lend you my drag, and you can ask Mrs. Chevenix, and Miss Luttrell, and myself, and a few other nice people; and Cinqmars and I will tool the team, eh? wouldn’t that be rather jolly?”

Mrs. Cinqmars opined that it would be charming—if dear Mrs. Chevenix would go.

Dear Mrs. Chevenix beheld a prospect of being choked with dust, and blinded by a blazing sun, or chilled to the marrow by an east wind, and was not elated. And after all it might be almost wiser to let Elizabeth go to the races with this rather fast Mrs. Cinqmars, without the restraint of any sterner chaperon. It might bring matters to a crisis.

“He can’t propose to her if I’m always at her elbow,” thought the sagacious matron. “I am hardly equal to the fatigue of a Derby-day,” she said; “but if Mrs. Cinqmars would not think it too much trouble to take care of Elizabeth——”

Mrs. Cinqmars protested that she would be charmed with such a charge. Elizabeth’s eyes sparkled: a race-course was still an unknown pleasure, one of the many mysteries of that brilliant world which she desired to know by heart before she bade her long good-bye to it.

So, after a little discussion, it was settled that Miss Luttrell was to go to Epsom in the drag with Mrs. Cinqmars.

“But I must see you between this and to-morrow week,” exclaimed that lady, who, perceiving in which quarter the wind lay, was resolved to take the best of the situation, and establish herself in the good graces of the future Viscountess. “I have a carpet dance on Friday evening; you really must come to me, Mrs. Chevenix. Now pray don’t say you are full of engagements for Friday night.”

“We are to dine in the Boltons,” hesitated Mrs. Chevenix; “we might possibly——”

“Drive on here afterwards,” cried Mrs. Cinqmars; “of course you could. Remember you are to be with me on Friday, Lord Paulyn.”

“I shall certainly come, if——”

“If Miss Luttrell comes. It’s really too bad of you to make me feel how little weight *my* influence has. Good-bye, if you positively won’t stay to dinner. I must go and say good-bye to those blue-and-white young ladies yonder.”

And with a sweeping continental curtsey, Mrs. Cinqmars fitted away in her befrilled-muslin draperies, and wonderful cherry-coloured satin petticoat with its organ-pipe flutings, and flying ebon tresses—a figure out of a fashion plate.

“I’ve told Captain Callender to drive the drag home,” said

the Viscount; "I thought perhaps you'd be charitable enough to give me a seat in your brougham, Mrs. Chevenix.

The third seat in Mrs. Chevenix's brougham was entirely at his disposal, not a very roomy seat; he was carried back to town half smothered in silk and muslin, but very well contented with his position nevertheless.

"Are you going to some very tremendous set-out this evening?" asked Lord Paulyn as they drove homewards.

"We are not going out at all, only I didn't feel inclined to accept Mrs. Cinqmars' invitation, so I had recourse to a polite fiction," answered Mrs. Chevenix.

"And I am particularly engaged to finish that novel in which you interrupted me so ruthlessly this morning," said Elizabeth.

"But the novel need not prevent your dining with us this evening, if you have no better engagement," rejoined Mrs. Chevenix.

"If I have no better engagement! As if I could have a better engagement."

"You might have a better dinner, at any rate. I can only promise you our everyday fare," answered the matron, secure in the possession of a good cook.

She had made a mental review of her dinner before hazarding the invitation; spring soup, a salmon trout, an infantine shoulder of lamb, a sweetbread, a gooseberry tart, and a parmesan omelette. He would hardly get a better dinner at his club; and had doubtless seen many a worse at Ashcombe.

"I should like to come of all things," said the Viscount. "And if you'd like to hear Patti this evening, I'll send my man to Mitchell's for a box while we dine," he added to Elizabeth.

To that young lady the Italian Opera-house was still a scene of enchantment.

"I cannot hear Patti too often," she said; "I should like to carry away the memory of her voice when I turn my back upon the world."

"Turn your back upon the world!" echoed Lord Paulyn. "What do you mean by that? You are not thinking of going into a convent, are you?"

"She is thinking of nothing so foolish," said Mrs. Chevenix, hastily.

"No; but the world and I will part company when I go back to Devonshire."

"O, but you're not going back in a hurry. You must stop for Goodwood, you know. She must stop for Goodwood, mustn't she, Mrs. Chevenix?"

"I should certainly like to take her down to Brighton for the Goodwood week."

"Yes, and I would have the drag down, and drive you backwards and forwards."

"My holiday must come to an end before July," said Elizabeth; and then turning to her aunt she said almost sternly, "You know, aunt, there is a reason for my going back soon."

"I know of no reason but your own whims and follies," exclaimed Mrs. Chevenix impatiently; "and I know that I made all my arrangements for taking you back to Devonshire early in the autumn, and not before that time."

Elizabeth's smooth young brow darkened a little, and she was silent for the rest of the drive; but this was not the first indication of a temper of her own with which the damsel had favoured Lord Paulyn, and it by no means disenchanting him. Indeed, by a strange perversity, he liked her all the better for such evidences of high spirit.

"I shall find out the way to break her in when once she belongs to me," he thought coolly.

The little dinner in Eaton-place-south went off very gaily. Elizabeth had recovered her serenity, and was elated by the idea of a night with Patti and Mozart. She went to the piano and sang some of the airs from *Don Giovanni* while they were waiting for dinner; her fresh young mezzo-soprano sounding rich and full as the voices of the thrushes and blackbirds in the grounds of the Rancho. She was full of talk during dinner; criticised Mrs. Cinqmars and the Rancho with a little dash of cynicism; was eager for information upon the probabilities of the Derby, and ready to accept any bets which Lord Paulyn proposed to her; and she seemed to have forgotten the very existence of such a place as Hawleigh.

Yet after the opera that night there was a little recrimination between the aunt and the niece; there had been no time for it before.

"I hope you have enjoyed your day and evening, Lizzie," said Mrs. Chevenix as the girl flung off her cloak, and seated herself upon a sofa in her aunt's dressing-room, with a weary air. "I'm sure you have had attention and adulation enough this day to satisfy the most exacting young woman."

"I hardly know what you understand by attention and adulation. If I have had anything of the kind, it has all been from one person. Lord Paulyn has not allowed me to say half-a-dozen words to any one but himself; and as his ideas are rather limited, it has been extremely monotonous."

"I should have supposed Lord Paulyn's attentions would have been sufficient for any reasonable young woman."

"Perhaps. If she happened to be disengaged, and wished to secure him for her husband. Not otherwise. And that reminds me of something that I wanted to say to you, auntie; you must remember my asking you to tell Lord Paulyn of my engagement to Mr. Forde."

"Yes, I remember something of the kind"

"But you have not told him."

"No, Elizabeth, I have not," replied the matron, busy taking off the various bracelets in which she was wont to fetter herself as heavily as an apprehended housebreaker, and with her eyes bent upon her work. "There are limits even to my forbearance; and that I should introduce you to society, to *my* friends, with that wretched engagement stamped upon you—labelled, as it were, like one of the pictures in the Academy—is something more than I could brook. I have not told Lord Paulyn, and I tell you frankly that I shall not waste my breath in announcing to any one an engagement which I do not believe will ever be fulfilled."

"What!" cried Elizabeth, starting from her half-recumbent attitude, and standing tall and straight before the audacious speaker. "What! Do you think that I would jilt him, that after having pined and hungered for his love I would wantonly fling it away? Yes, I will speak the truth, however you may ridicule or despise me. I loved him with all my heart and soul for a year before he told me that my love was not all wasted anguish. I was breaking my heart when he came to my rescue, and translated me from the lowest depths of despondency to a heaven of delight. Do you think that after I have suffered so much for his sake I would trifle with the treasure I have won?"

"Please don't stand looking at me like Miss Bateman in *Leah*," said aunt Chevenix with an ease of manner which was half-assumed. "I think you are the most foolish girl it was ever my misfortune to be connected with, and I freely admit that it is hardly safe to speculate upon the conduct of such an irrational being. But I will nevertheless venture to prophesy that you will not marry your curate, and that you will marry some one a great deal better worth having."

"I will never see Lord Paulyn again. I will go back to Hawleigh to-morrow," said Elizabeth.

"Do just as you please," replied Mrs. Chevenix coolly, knowing that opposition would only inflame the damsel's pride.

"Or, at any rate, I shall tell Lord Paulyn of my engagement."

"Do, my dear. But as he has never spoken of his regard for you, the information may appear somewhat gratuitous."

Elizabeth stood before her silent, lost in thought.

To turn and fly would be the wisest, safest course.

She felt that her position was a false one; dangerous even, with some small danger; that Lord Paulyn's attentions, commonplace as they might be, were attentions she, Malcolm's plighted wife, had no right to receive. She knew that all these garish pleasures and dissipations which occupied her mind from morning till night were out of harmony with the life she had

chosen; the fair calm future which she dreamed of sometimes, after falling asleep worn out by the day's frivolous labours. But to go back suddenly, after it had been arranged that she should remain with her aunt at least a month longer, was not easy. There would be such wonderment on the part of her sisters, so many questions to answer. Even Malcolm himself would be naturally surprised by her impetuosity, for in her very last letter she had carefully explained to him the necessity for her visit being extended until the second week in June.

No, it was not easy to return to the shelter of Hawleigh Vicarage; and, on the other hand, there was her unsatisfied curiosity about the Derby, that one peculiar pleasure of a great race which had been described to her as beyond all other pleasures. Better to drain the cup to satiety, so that there might be no after longings. She would take care to give the Viscount no encouragement during the remainder of her brief career; she would snub him ruthlessly, even though he were a being somewhat difficult to snub. So she resolved to stay, and received her aunt's pacific advances graciously, and went to bed and dreamt of the Commendatore; and the statue that stalked in time to that awful music—music which is the very essence of all things spectral—bore the face of Malcolm Forde.

CHAPTER III.

“ Bianca's heart was coldly frosted o'er
 With snows unmelting—an eternal sheet;
 But his was red within him, like the core
 Of old Vesuvius, with perpetual heat;
 And oft he long'd internally to pour
 His flames and glowing lava at her feet;
 But when his burnings he began to spout,
 She stopp'd his mouth—and put the crater out.”

THE Derby-day was over; an exceptionally brilliant Derby, run under a summer-like sky; roads gloriously dusty; western breezes blowing; the favourite, a famous French horse, triumphant; everybody, except perhaps the book-men, and sundry other mistaken speculators, elated; Mrs. Cinqmars seeing her way to a twelvemonth's supply of Piver and Jouvin; Elizabeth also a considerable winner of the same species of spoil.

The Viscount was not altogether delighted by the great event of the day. He had withdrawn his own entries two or three months ago, but had backed a Yorkshire horse, from Whitehall, somewhat heavily, sceptical as to the merits of the Frenchman.

"It's all very well while he's among French horses," he had said, "winning your Grand Prix, and that kind of thing; but let him come over here and lick a field of genuine English blood and sinew, if he can."

The Frenchman had accepted the challenge, and had left the pride and glory of many a British stable in the ruck behind his flying heels.

"Couldn't have done it if there wasn't English blood in him," said the Viscount grimly, as he pushed his way within the sacred precincts to see the jockey weighed. "I wish I'd had some money on him."

Instead of the pleasing idea of that potful of money which he might have secured by backing the Frenchman, Lord Pauly had a cargo of gloves to provide for the fair speculators—whose eager championship of the stranger he had smiled at somewhat scornfully half-an-hour ago—to say nothing of far heavier losses which only such estates as the Pauly domains could bear easily.

"I shall pull up on Ascot," he thought, and was not sorry to resign the reins to Mr. Cinqmars during the homeward journey, while he abandoned his powerful mind to a close calculation of his chances for the next great meeting. He was a man with whom the turf was a serious business; a man who went as carefully into all the ins and outs of horse-racing, as a great financier into the science of the stock-exchange; and he had hitherto contrived to make his winnings cover all his stable expenses, and even at times leave a handsome margin beyond them. Above all things he hated losing, and his meditative brow, as he sat beside Mr. Cinqmars, bore a family resemblance to the countenance of the astute dowager when she gave herself up to the study of her private ledger.

Even Elizabeth's fresh young voice running gaily on just behind him did not arouse him from his moody abstraction. He had been all devotion during the drive to Epsom, and Miss Luttrell's coldness and incivility, which of late had been marked, had not been sufficient to repel or discourage him. What did he care whether she were civil or uncivil? He rather liked those chilling airs, and angry flashes from brilliant eyes. They gave a charm and piquancy to her society which he had never found in the insipid amiability of other women. What did it matter how she flouted him? He meant to marry her, and she of course meant to marry him. It was not to be supposed that any woman in her right mind would refuse such an offer. And in the mean while these coldnesses, and little bitter speeches, and disdainful looks were the merest coquetries—a Benedick-and-Beatrice or Katherine-and-Petruchio kind of business. See how uncivil that fair shrew was at the outset, and how much she

bore from her newly-wedded master afterwards. Lord Paulyn smiled to himself as he thought of Petruchio. "I've got a trifle of that sort of stuff in me," he said to himself complacently.

"What is the matter with Lord Paulyn?" asked Elizabeth of Mrs. Cinqmars, when they were changing horses at Mitcham, and the Viscount's gloom became, for the first time, obvious to her. She had been too busy to notice him until that moment, agreeably employed in discussing the day's racing with a couple of cavalry officers, particular friends of Mr. Cinqmars, who were delighted with the privilege of instructing her in the mysteries of the turf. She had a way of being intensely interested in whatever engaged her attention for the moment, and was as eager to hear about favourites and jockeys as if she had been the daughter of some Yorkshire squire, almost cradled in a racing stable, and swaddled in a horse-cloth.

"I'm afraid he has been losing money," said Mrs. Cinqmars, as the Viscount descended to inspect his horses and refresh himself with brandy-and-soda. "He ought to have backed the foreigner. He does look rather glum, doesn't he?"

"Does he mind losing a little money?" exclaimed Elizabeth incredulously.

"I don't think there are many people who like it," answered Mrs. Cinqmars, laughing.

"But he is so enormously rich, I should have thought he could hardly care about it. I know that Lady Paulyn, his mother, is very fond of money; but for a young man to care—I should have thought it impossible."

"Very low, isn't it?" said Major Bolding, one of her instructors in the science of racing; "but rather a common weakness. So very human. Only it's bad form to show it, as Paulyn does."

"It's only rich people who have a genuine affection for money," remarked Mrs. Cinqmars; "a poor man never keeps a sovereign long enough to become attached to it."

The examination of his team did not tend to improve the Viscount's temper. They had sustained various infinitesimal injuries in the journey to and from the course, so he refreshed himself by swearing a little in a subdued manner at his grooms, who had nothing to do with these damages, and then consumed his brandy-and-soda in a sullen silence, only replying to Mr. Cinqmars' lively remarks by reluctant monosyllables.

"Can't you let a fellow alone when you see he's thinking?" he exclaimed at last.

"I wouldn't think too much if I were you, Paulyn," said Mr. Cinqmars, in his genial, happy-go-lucky manner; "I don't believe you've the kind of brain that can stand it. I've made a point of never thinking since I was five-and-twenty. I go up to the City and do my work in a couple of hours with pen, ink,

and paper; all my figures before me in black-and-white, not dancing about my brain from morning till night, and from night till morning, as some men let them dance. When I've settled everything at my desk, I give my junior partner his orders. And before I've taken my hat off the peg to leave the office, I've emptied my brain of all business ideas and perplexities as clean as if I'd taken a broom and swept it."

"All very well while you're making money," said the Viscount, "but you couldn't do that if you were losing."

"Perhaps not. But there are men who can't make money without wearing their brains out with perpetual mental arithmetic, men who carry the last two pages of their banking-book pasted upon the inside of their heads, and are always going over the figures. Those are the men who go off their nuts by the time they're worth a million or so, and cut their throats for fear of dying in a workhouse. Come, I say, Paulyn, I know you're savage with yourself for not backing the foreigner, but you can put your money on him for the Leger, and come home that way."

"Very likely, when there's five to four on him!" cried the Viscount contemptuously. Then, brightening a little, he inquired what was to be the order of things that night at the Rancho.

"We've a lot of people coming to dinner at nine, or so, and I suppose my wife means a dance afterwards."

"Like Cremorne," said Lord Paulyn. "Mind your wife makes Miss Luttrell stay."

"O, of course; we couldn't afford to lose the star of the evening. A fine girl, isn't she?" added Mr. Cinqmars, glancing critically upwards at the figure in the front seat of the drag.

"A fine girl!" echoed the Viscount contemptuously; "she's the handsomest woman I ever set eyes on, bar none."

Lord Paulyn improved considerably after this, and when he went back to the box-seat took care that Major Bolding had no farther opportunity of demonstrating his familiarity with the arcana of the turf. He engaged the whole of Elizabeth's attention, and was not to be rebuffed by her coldness, and took upon himself the manner of an acknowledged lover; a manner which was not a little embarrassing to the plighted wife of Malcolm Forde.

"I must make an end of it as soon as possible," she thought. "I don't know that to-day's amusement has been worth the penalty I have to pay for it."

The drag was crossing Clapham-common, an admiring crowd gazing upward at the patrician vehicle as it towered above wagonettes, barouches, landaus, hansoms, and costermongers' trucks, when Elizabeth gave a little start of surprise at recog-

nising a face that belonged to Hawleigh. It was only the rubicund visage of a Hawleigh farmer, a man who had a family pew at St. Clement's, and who dutifully attended the two services every Sunday, with an apple-cheeked wife and a brood of children. He was one of a very hilarious party in a wagonette, a party of stout middle-aged persons of the publican order, who were smoking vehemently, and had wooden dolls stuck in their hatbands. She saw him look up and recognise her with ineffable surprise, and immediately communicate the fact of her presence to his companions, whereat there was a general upward gaze of admiring eyes, more or less bedimmed by dubious champagne.

"What's the matter?" asked Lord Pauly, perceiving that slight movement of surprise.

"Nothing. I saw a person I know in a wagonette; only Mr. Treby, a farmer who goes to papa's church; but I was surprised at seeing him here."

"Not very astonishing; the Derby is a grand festival for provincials; and we are such an unenlightened set in the West, we have no great races. For a Yorkshireman, now, there is nothing to see in the South. His own race-courses are as fine as anything we can show him here."

Elizabeth was silent. She was thinking how Mr. Treby would go back and tell the little world of Hawleigh how he had seen her perched high up on a gaudy yellow-bodied coach, one of two women among a party of a dozen men, dominating that noisy dissipated-looking crowd, with a pink-lined parasol between her and the low sunlight; and she was thinking that the picture would hardly seem a pleasing vision to the eyes of Malcolm Forde. She had meant of course to tell him of her day at Epsom, but then the same things might seem very different described by herself and by Mr. Treby. She tried to take comfort from the thought that, after all, Mr. Treby might say very little about the encounter, and that the little he did say might not happen to reach Malcolm's ears. Malcolm! dear name! Only to breathe it softly to herself was like the utterance of some soothing spell.

After that glimpse of Mr. Treby's rubicund visage in the wagonette her spirits flagged a little. She was glad when the drag passed Putney-bridge. How brightly ran the river under the western sun! How gay the steep old-fashioned street, with its flags and open windows and noisy taverns and lounging boating-men. The scene had a garish tawdry look, somehow, and her head ached to desperation. She was very glad when they drove into the cool shades of the Rancho.

"O, yes, thanks; I've had a most delightful day," she said, in reply to Mr. Cinqmars' inquiry as to her enjoyment of the great festival; "but the noise and the sunshine have given me a head-

ache, and I think, if you would let me go home at once, it would be best for me."

"Go home! nonsense, my dear! your aunt is to dine with us, and take you back after our little dance. It's only half-past seven. You shall have a cup of green tea, and then lie down and rest for an hour, and you'll be as fresh as a rose by nine o'clock. Turner, take Miss Luttrell to the blue room, and make her comfortable."

This order was given to a smartly-dressed maid, who had come to take the ladies' cloaks and parasols.

Elizabeth gave a little sigh of resignation. If it were possible to grow sick to death of this bright new world all in a moment, such a sickness seemed to have come upon her. But from the maelstrom of pleasure, be it only the feeblest provincial whirlpool, swift and sudden extrication is, for the most part, difficult.

"I will stop, if you wish," she said; "but my head is really very bad."

In spite of her headache, however, Miss Luttrell appeared at the banquet—which was delayed by tardy arrivals till about a quarter to ten—brightest amongst the brilliant. Mrs. Chevenix was there in her glory, on the right hand of Mr. Cinqmars, and was fain to confess to herself that the society which these people contrived to get about them was by no means despicable—a little fast, undoubtedly, and with the masculine element predominating somewhat obviously; but it was pleasant, when venturing out of one's own strictly correct circle, to find oneself among so many people with handles to their names. Lord Paulyne had by this time entirely recovered his equanimity, and had contrived to take Elizabeth in to dinner—a somewhat noisy feast, at which everybody talked of the event of the day, as if it were the beginning, middle, and end of the great scheme of creation. The wide windows were all open to the spring night; hanging moderator lamps shed their subdued light upon a vast oval table, which was like a dwarf forest of ferns, stephanotis, and scarlet geranium. It was quite as good as dining out of doors, without the inconveniences attendant upon the actual thing.

A little after eleven o'clock there came a crash of opening chords from a piano, cornet, and violin, artfully hidden in a small room off the drawing-room, and then the low entrancing melody of a waltz by Strauss. The ladies rose at the sound, and the greater number of the gentlemen left the dining-room with them.

"We can leave those fellows drinking curaçoa, and squabbling about the odds for the Oaks," said Major Bolding. "We don't want them."

This was an undeniable fact, for the danseuses were much in

the minority. There were a sprinkling of wives of authors and actors; a few dearest friends of Mrs. Cinqmars, who seemed to stand more or less alone in the world, and to be free-lances in the way of flirtation; a young lady with long raven ringlets and a sentimental air, who was said to be something very great in the musical line, but was rarely allowed to exhibit her talents; a stout literary widow, who founded all her fashionable novels on the society at the Rancho; and a popular actress, who could sometimes be persuaded to gratify her friends with the "Charge of the Six Hundred," or the famous scene between Mr. Pickwick and the Bath magistrate.

Elizabeth found herself assailed by a herd of eager supplicants, who entreated for round dances. No one ever suggested quadrilles at the Rancho, nor were these unceremonious assemblies fettered by the iron bondage of a programme.

"Remember," said Lord Paulyn, "you've promised me three waltzes."

"If I dance at all; but I don't think I shall."

"Neither shall I then," answered the Viscount, coolly. "A *d'autres*, gentlemen, Miss Luttrell doesn't dance to-night."

"I'd rather take a refusal from the lady's own lips, if it's all the same to you, Paulyn," said Major Bolding.

"The dust and heat have given me an excruciating headache, and I really do not feel equal to waltzing," answered Elizabeth.

"Shall I get them to play a quadrille?"

"No, thanks. I'm hardly equal to that either; and I know Mrs. Cinqmars hates square dances."

"Never mind Mrs. Cinqmars. Half a loaf is better than no bread. If you'll dance the first set, the Lancers—anything—Shall I tell the fellow to play the Grand Duchesse or La Belle Hélène?"

"Please don't. But if you'll take me for a turn by the river I should be glad. Will you come, auntie? I don't suppose these rooms really are hot; but in spite of all those open windows, I feel almost stifled."

Lord Paulyn's countenance was obscured by a scowl at this proposition, and Mrs. Chevenix was quick to perceive the cloud. What could Elizabeth mean by such incorrigible fatuity? Was it not bad enough to have a country curate in the background, without introducing a new element of discord in the person of this dashing major? There was no time for careful diplomacy; the situation demanded an audacious master-stroke.

"Lord Paulyn can take care of you, Lizzie," said the matron, "and I'll ask Major Bolding to give me his arm; for I want to talk to him about my dear friends, the Clutterbucks. Relatives of yours, are they not, Major?"

"Yes: Tom Clutterbuck's something in the way of a cousin,"

growled the reluctant Major, rather sulkily. "But they're in Rome, and I haven't heard of them for an age."

He offered his arm to the aunt instead of the niece, with a tolerably resigned air, however, perceiving that the position was more critical than he had supposed, and not wishing to mar Miss Luttrell's chances. So Mrs. Chevenix sailed off through the open window to the lawn, a ponderous figure in purple satin and old point, and Elizabeth found herself constrained to accept the escort of the man she so ardently desired to keep at a convenient distance.

They walked slowly down to the river terrace, almost in silence. That scene of a moonlit garden by a moonlit river is one of those pictures whose beauty seems for ever fresh; from Putney to Reading, what a succession of riverside paradises greets the envious eyes of the traveller! And at sight of every new domain he cries, "Oh, this is lovelier than all the rest! here would I end my days." And all mankind's aspirations after a comfortable income and a peaceful existence include

"A river at my garden's end."

But it was not the tranquil splendour of the moonlight, or the eternal beauty of the river, that moved the soul of Reginald Paulyn, and held him in unaccustomed silence. He was angry. Some dull sparks of his vexation at having backed the wrong horse yet smouldered in his breast; but he was much more angry at the conduct of Elizabeth Luttrell. It was all very well to be snubbed, to be trifled with, to be played with as a fish that the angler means to land anon with tender care, but there had been something too much of this. The damsel had said one or two things at dinner that had been intended to enlighten him, and had in some measure removed the bandage from his eyes. He wanted to know the exact meaning of these speeches. He wanted to know, without an hour's delay, whether she, Elizabeth Luttrell, a country parson's penniless daughter, were capable of setting him at naught.

He hardly knew in what words to frame his desire; and perhaps at this moment, for the first time in his life, it dawned upon him that the chosen vocabulary of his own particular set was a somewhat restricted language for a man in his position.

Elizabeth made some remark about the beauty of the scene—so much better than any drawing-room—and he answered her mechanically, and that was all that was said by either until they came to the river terrace, by which time Mrs. Chevenix and her companion, who had walked briskly, were at some distance from them.

"Stop a bit, Miss Luttrell," said Lord Paulyn, coming to a sudden standstill by the stone balustrade that guarded a flight

of steps leading down to the water. "Don't be in such a hurry to overtake those two; they'll get on well enough without us. I want to talk to you—about—about something very particular."

Elizabeth's heart sank at this ominous prelude. She felt that it was coming, that crisis which of late she had done her utmost to avert.

"I can't imagine what you can have to say to me," she said, with an airy little laugh and a very fair assumption of carelessness.

Lord Paulyn leant upon the balustrade, with his elbow planted on the stone, looking up at her with a resolute scrutiny.

"Can't you?" he asked somewhat bitterly. "And yet I should think it was easy enough for you to guess what I'm going to say to you in plain words to-night. I've been saying it in a hundred ways for the last six weeks—saying it plain enough for any one to understand, I should have thought—any one in their senses, at least, and there doesn't seem room for much doubt about yours. I love you, Elizabeth—that's what I have to say—and I mean you to be my wife."

"You *mean* me," cried Elizabeth, with inexpressible scorn, and a laugh that stung her lover as sharply as a blow—"you *mean* me to be your wife! Upon my honour, Lord Paulyn, you have quite an oriental idea of a woman's position. You are to fling your handkerchief to your favourite slave, and she is to pick it up and bring it to you with a curtsy."

"You never look so handsome as when you are angry," said the Viscount undismayed, and smiling at her wrath. "But don't be angry with me; I didn't intend to offend you. I should have said the same if you had been a princess of the blood royal. I only tell you what I swore to myself last November, the day I first saw your face in Hawleigh church: That's the woman I'll have for my wife. I never yet set my heart upon anything that I didn't win it. I know how cleverly you've played me for the last five weeks, keeping me on by keeping me off, eh? But we may as well drop all that sort of thing now, Elizabeth. You are the only woman in this world I'll ever make a viscountess of; and of course you've known that all along, or you wouldn't have given me the encouragement you have given me, in your offhand way. Don't try to humbug me. I'm a man of the world, and I've known from the first that it was a settled thing between you and the old woman—I beg your pardon, Mrs. Chevenix."

"Encouragement!" cried Elizabeth, aghast; "I give you encouragement, Lord Paulyn! Why, I've done everything in the world to show you my indifference."

"O, yes; I know all about that. You've been uncivil enough, I grant you, and many a man in my position would have been

choked off; but I'm not that kind of fellow. You've given me as much of your society as circumstances allowed—that's the grand point—and you must have known that every day made me more desperately in love with you. You're not going to round upon me and pretend indifference after that. It would be rather too bad."

Elizabeth was silent for a brief space, conscience-stricken. She had deemed this lordling of so shallow a nature that it could matter little how she trifled with him. He had his *grande passion*, no doubt, every season—hovered butterfly-like around some particular flower in the fashionable parterre, and flew off unscathed when London began to grow empty. That she could inflict any wrong upon him by suffering his attentions had never occurred to her. She had thought at one time even that it would be rather nice to bring him to her feet, and astound him by a cool refusal. And even now, though she was not a little perplexed by a kind of rough earnestness and intensity in his speech and manner, she did feel a faint thrill of triumph in the idea of his subjugation. It would be something to tell Gertrude and Diana—those representatives of her little world, who had sneered at the humble end of all her grand ideas: there would be not a little satisfaction to her pride in being able to tell them that Lord Paulyn had actually proposed to her.

The coronet of the Paulyns, the airy round and top of sovereignty, floated before her vision for a moment, as she looked across the moonlit river, phantom-wise, like Macbeth's dagger. If she had not loved that other one above the sordid splendours of the world, what a brilliant fortune might have been hers! And Reginald was not positively obnoxious to her. He was good-looking, seemed good-natured, had been the veriest slave of her every whim, and she had grown accustomed to his society. She had no doubt that he would have made a very tolerable husband; and as the inexhaustible source of carriages, horses, opera-boxes, diamonds, yachts, and riverside villas, she must needs have regarded him with a certain grateful fondness, had she been free to accept him. But she was bound to a man whom she loved to distraction, and not to be an empress would she have loosened that dear bondage.

"It's all my aunt's fault," she said, after that brief pause; "I begged her—she ought to have told you that I am engaged to be married."

"Engaged!" cried the Viscount; "engaged! Not since you've come to town! Why, I know almost every fellow that has been hanging about you, and they have had precious little chance, unless it's some one you've met at those confounded parties on the other side of Hyde-park."

"I was engaged before I came to London."

"What, to some fellow in Hawleigh! And you let me dance attendance upon you, and spend three mornings a week in Eaton-place, and follow you about to every infernal picture-gallery till the greens and blues in their confounded landscapes gave me the vertigo, and to every twopenny-halfpenny flower-show, staring at azaleas and rhododendrons; and then you turn round and tell me you're engaged! By —, Miss Luttrell, if you mean what you say, you're the most brazen-faced flirt it was ever my bad luck to meet with in half-a-dozen London seasons!"

Elizabeth drew herself up, trembling with anger. What, did he dare insult her? And had she really been guilty? Conscience was slow to answer that question.

"How dare you talk to me like that?" she exclaimed. "I—I will never speak to you again as long as I live, Lord Pauly." A woman's favourite threat in moments of extremity, and generally the prelude to a torrent of words.

"By the right you've given me every day for the last six weeks. By the right which the world has assumed when it couples our names, as they are coupled by every one who knows us. Throw me over, if you like; but it will be the worse for you if you do, for every one will say it was I who jilted you. A woman can't carry on as you've carried on, and then turn round and say, O, I beg your pardon, it was all a mistake; I'm engaged to somebody else." And then suddenly, with a still fiercer flash of anger, he demanded, "Who is he? Who is the man?"

"The gentleman to whom I have the honour to be engaged is Mr. Forde, my father's curate. Perhaps it would be better for you to make your complaint about my conduct to him."

"Egad, I should think he'd be rather astonished if I did enlighten him a little on that score! Your father's curate? So it's for the sake of a beggarly curate you are going to throw me over the bridge."

"You are at liberty to insult me, Lord Pauly, but I must insist upon your refraining from any insolent mention of my future husband. And now, perhaps, as we quite understand each other, you will be good enough to let me go to my aunt."

"Don't be in such a hurry, Miss Luttrell," said the Viscount, white with anger. That he, Reginald Pauly, should be rejected by any woman living, least of all by a country vicar's daughter, and in favour of a country curate! It was not to be endured. But of course she was not in earnest; this pretended refusal was only an elaborate coquetry. "I'm—I'm not a bad-tempered man, that I'm aware," he went on, after struggling with his rising ire; "but there are some things beyond any man's forbearance; and after leading me on as you have done—"

that you can look me in the face and tell me you're going to marry another man! I won't believe it of you; no, not from your own lips. Come, Elizabeth, be reasonable; drop all this nonsense. Never mind if there has been some kind of flirtation between you and Forde; let bygones be bygones; I won't quarrel with the past. But give me a straight answer, like a woman of the world. Remember, there's nothing you care for in this world that I can't give you; you were made to occupy a brilliant position, and I love you better than I ever loved any human creature."

He took her hand, which she did not withdraw from him; she let him hold it in his strong grasp, a poor little icy-cold unresisting hand. For the first time it dawned upon her that she had done him a great wrong.

"Do you really care for me?" she asked with a serious wondering air. "I am so sorry, and begin to see that I have done wrong; I ought to have been more candid. But indeed, Lord Paulyn, it is my aunt's fault. I begged her to tell you of my engagement. I would have told you myself even, only," with a feeble little laugh, "I could hardly volunteer such a piece of information; it would have been so presumptuous to suppose that you were in any danger from our brotherly and sisterly acquaintance."

"Brotherly and sisterly be hanged!" said the Viscount; "you must have known that I doated on you. God knows I've let you see it plain enough. I've never hid my light under a bushel."

After this there came another brief silence. Elizabeth looking thoughtfully at the rippling water, Lord Paulyn watching her face with a gloomy air.

"Come," he said at last, "what is it to be? Are you going to throw me over for the sake of this curate fellow? Are you going to bury yourself alive in a country parsonage, teaching a pack of snivelling children psalm-singing? You've tasted blood; you know something of what life is. Come, Lizzie, be just to yourself and me. Write this Forde fellow a civil letter telling him you've changed your mind."

"Not for Egypt," said Elizabeth, turning her flashing eyes upon him—eyes which a moment before had been gazing dreamily at the river. "You do not know how I love him. Yes, I love the world too," she went on, as if answering that sordid plea by which the Viscount had endeavoured to sustain his suit; "I do love the world. Its pleasures are all so new to me, and I have enjoyed my life unspeakably since I've been in London, yes, in spite of being parted from him. But I could no more give him up than I could cut my heart out of my body, and live. I am quite willing to admit that I have done

wrong;”—this with an air of proud humility which was very rare in Elizabeth Luttrell—“I beg your pardon, Lord Paulyn; I entreat you to forgive me, and accept my friendship instead of my love. You have been very kind to me, very indulgent to all my caprices and tempers, and believe me I am not ungrateful.

“Forgive you!” he echoed, with a harsh laugh; “be your friend, when I had made up my mind to be your husband! Rather hard lines. However, I suppose friendship must count for something; and as you prefer the notion of psalm-singing and three sermons a Sunday to a house in Mayfair, a yacht at Cowes, a racing-box at Newmarket, and stables in Yorkshire—I should have liked to show you my Yorkshire stables and stud farm,” with a dreamy fondness—“as you have made your choice, I suppose I must abide by it. And we’ll be friends, Lizzie. I may call you Lizzie, mayn’t I? It’s only one of the privileges of friendship.”

“You may call me anything you like, if you’ll only promise never to renew this subject, and to forgive me for having unwittingly deceived you.”

The Viscount clasped her hand in both of his, then touched it with his lips for the first time. And as he kissed the little white hand, with a fond lingering pressure, he vowed a vow; but whether of friendship and fealty, or of passionate, treacherous, selfish love, was a secret hidden in the soul of the Viscount himself.

Elizabeth accepted the kiss as a pledge of fidelity, and anon began to talk of indifferent subjects with a somewhat forced gaiety, as if she would have made believe that there had been no love-scene between Lord Paulyn and herself. They left the landing-place, and strolled slowly on to join the Major and aunt Chevenix, who were both sorely weary of their enforced meanderings. The matron smiled upon Elizabeth with the smile of triumph; she had seen those two motionless figures from afar as she paced the other end of the long terrace with her companion, and assured herself that the Viscount had come to the point.

Now, as they came towards her walking side by side with a friendly air, she told herself that all was well. Elizabeth had renounced the ways of foolishness, and had accepted that high fortune which a bounteous destiny had reserved for her.

“I said it when she was still in pinafores,” thought Mrs. Chevenix; “that girl was born to be a peeress.”

CHAPTER IV.

“The company is ‘mix’d’ (the phrase I quote is
 As much as saying, they’re below your notice);
 For a ‘mix’d’ company implies that, save
 Yourself and friends, and half a hundred more,
 Whom you may bow to without looking grave,
 The rest are but a vulgar set, the bore
 Of public places, where they basely brave
 The fashionable stare of twenty score
 Of well-bred persons, call’d ‘*The World* ;’ but I,
 Although I know them, really don’t know why.”

BITTER, with unutterable bitterness, was the disappointment of aunt Chevenix, when at breakfast next morning she was made acquainted with the actual state of affairs. Lord Paulyn had verily proposed, and had been rejected.

“To say that you are mad, Elizabeth, is to say nothing,” exclaimed Mrs. Chevenix, casting herself back in her chair, and regarding her niece with a stony gaze, egg-spoon in hand; “you were *that* when you accepted Mr. Forde. But *this* is a besotted idiotcy for which even your previous folly had not prepared me.”

“You surely did not think that I should jilt Mr. Forde?”

“I surely did not think you would refuse Lord Paulyn,” echoed her aunt; “a girl of your tastes—the very last of young women to marry a person in Mr. Forde’s position. Upon my word, Elizabeth, it is too bad, positively cruel, after the pride I have felt in you, the money I have spent upon you even, though I am above alluding to that. Your conduct is a death-blow to all my hopes.” And here Mrs. Chevenix wept real tears, which she wiped despondently from her powdered cheeks.

“Pray don’t cry, auntie. I am something like a man in that respect; I can’t bear the sight of tears. I am very sorry for having disappointed you, but it would be hardly a fair thing to Lord Paulyn to marry him while my heart belongs entirely to some one else, to say nothing of Malcolm himself——”

“Malcolm!” exclaimed Mrs. Chevenix, with profound disgust. “To think that I should have a niece—my favourite niece too—capable of marrying a man called Malcolm.”

“I’m sorry you don’t like his name, auntie. To my ear it is music.”

“Yes, like the Scotch bagpipes, I suppose,” said the elder lady, in accents of withering scorn.

“And now, dearest auntie, let there be no quarrelling between us,” pleaded Elizabeth. “I daresay it is disappointing to you for me to settle down into a country clergyman’s wife, after all my grand talk about marrying well, and riding through the world in my own barouche, over people’s bodies, as it were like

the lady in Roman history. I did not know my own heart when I talked like that. I did not think that I should ever be weak enough to love anybody fifty times better than carriages and horses. Please let us be friends," she went on, coaxingly, and kneeling down by the offended matron. "Lord Paulyn has forgiven me, and he and I are to be excellent friends for the rest of our lives. Perhaps he will give Malcolm a living; I daresay he has three or four handsome benefices among his possessions."

"Friends indeed!" cried Mrs. Chevenix, contemptuously; "I'm sure I thought last night that it was all settled, and even began to think of your trousseau. I never in my life had such a disappointment."

Little by little, however, the matron's indignation, or the outward show of that passion, abated, and she permitted her wounded spirits to be soothed by Elizabeth's caresses. Happily for the damsel, the business of life, that business of pleasure which sometimes involves more wear and tear of mind and body than the most serious pursuit of wealth or fame, must needs go on. Once in the whirlpool of Mrs. Cinqmars' set, and there was no escape for Elizabeth and her chaperon; all their other engagements were as nothing to that lady's demands upon their time, and Mrs. Chevenix, for some unexplained reason, had entered upon a close alliance with the mistress of the Rancho.

"I did not think Mrs. Cinqmars was at all your style, auntie," Elizabeth said, wondering that this new-fledged friendship should be so strong upon the wing.

"Mrs. Cinqmars' style may not be faultless, but she is one of the best-natured little women I ever met, and has the art of making her house most delightful," replied Mrs. Chevenix decisively.

"I think we ought to take our brass bedsteads out to Fulham, and camp under the trees, now the warm weather has set in. We almost live there, as it is," said Elizabeth.

There was some foundation for this remark in the fact that Mrs. Chevenix and her niece were oftener at the Rancho than anywhere else. Mrs. Cinqmars devoted all the forces of her being to the pursuit of pleasure; and as these gaieties and hospitalities assisted Mr. Cinqmars not a little in the pursuit of gain, the lady was allowed the free exercise of her talents in the art of making people forget that life was meant for anything graver or loftier than a perpetual talking of small-talk, and quaffing of iced cups in the summer sunshine, now under the striped awning of a barge gliding up the sunlit river, anon in the cool glades of some primæval forest, like Windsor or Burnham Beeches. If the destiny of mankind began and ended in picnics, water-parties, kettledrums, and private theatricals, Mrs. Cinqmars would have been among the leaders of the world; but.

unfortunately for the lady, those delights are fleeting as the bubbles on the river, and, however wide their circle spreads, make but brief impressions, and are forgotten after a season or two. Mr. and Mrs. Cinqmars might have commemorated themselves in a pyramid as high as Pharaoh's, built out of empty champagne bottles; but so ungrateful are the butterfly race they fed, that almost the only record of their hospitality at the end of a season was a yard full of empty bottles, and the cases, which an odd man chopped up for firewood.

While the season lasted, however, Mrs. Cinqmars drank freely of pleasure's sparkling cup, and found no bitterness even in the lees thereof. She rarely left a blank day in her programme. Every week brought its water-party or its picnic. Every morning found her breakfast-tray—she did not leave her room till the business of the day began—piled high with notes of acceptance or refusal in answer to her coquettish little notes of invitation. She was not a person who sent meaningless cards "requesting," but wrote dainty little letters on monogram-emblazoned paper, full of familiar nothings, breathing the warmest friendship.

"The season is so short," she used to say pensively, "one cannot do too much while the fine weather lasts."

After that day at Epsom Mrs. Cinqmars made no party to which she did not invite her dearest Miss Luttrell. She was eager for the society of her dearest Mrs. Chevenix at all her dinners and afternoons; but there were picnics and water-parties which might be too fatiguing for that dearest friend, on which occasions she begged to be intrusted with the care of her sweet Miss Luttrell—a privilege the matron was not slow to accord. Dinners and dances in Tyburnia were declined with ruthlessness in favour of Mrs. Cinqmars—ay, even a dinner in Eaton-square, at the abode of a millionaire baronet, in the iron trade.

"Upon my word, auntie, I don't care about going so much to Mrs. Cinqmars'," Elizabeth remonstrated. "I certainly do enjoy myself more at her parties than anywhere else, but I hardly think Malcolm would like me to spend so much time in that kind of society."

"You had better send a statement of all your engagements to Mr. Forde, and allow him to direct your movements," replied Mrs. Chevenix; and mingled feelings, the fear of ridicule, and her own inclination, which drew her strongly towards Henley and Virginia Water, kept Elizabeth silent.

Mr. Forde's remonstrances about the length of her visit had abated of late, for the Curate had been summoned to Scotland, to attend the sick bed of one of his few remaining kindred, his father's only brother, an old man to whom he was warmly attached. His letters came now from the North, and were only brief records of sufferings from which there seemed no hope of

other relief than death. He had no time to write at length to his betrothed, and no spirits for letter-writing. "I don't want to sadden you, dearest," he wrote, "and therefore make my letters of the briefest, for my mind is full of our patient, and the quiet fortitude with which he endures this protracted trial, too full even for those happy thoughts of the future, which have brightened my life of late. But I do look forward to our meeting, Lizzie; whatever sorrow may lie between this hour and that. And I hope to hear speedily of your return to the West."

"Do you know if this uncle is likely to leave him any money?" Mrs. Chevenix inquired, with a languid interest, when she was informed of Mr. Forde's movements. A few hundreds a year could make little difference in that poverty-stricken career which Elizabeth had chosen for herself. It would be but as a grain of sand, when weighed against a viscount's coronet and half-a-dozen estates.

"I believe Malcolm will be richer, auntie. There is a small estate in Scotland that must come to him."

"A small estate in Scotland, where land rents at ten shillings an acre, I suppose. Or perhaps it is all waste, mere sand and heather. But what does it matter? You have chosen to go through life a pauper. It is only a question of a crust of bread more or less."

There was hardly a necessity for Elizabeth to hurry back to Hawleigh, to the untimely cutting off of all these summer delights, when Mr. Forde was away. She thought how dreary the place would seem without him. Gertrude, Diana, Blanche, with their stock phrases and their perennial commonplaces and their insignificant scraps of gossip about the Hawleigh gentry; the dull old High-street; the shop-windows she had looked at so often, till she knew every item of the merchandise. She thought of going over all the old ground again with a shudder. "Life in a convent would be gayer," she thought; "the nuns could not *all* be Gertrudes and Dianas."

So she wrote a dutiful letter to her betrothed, full of sympathy with his sorrow, and informing him that she was beginning to grow a little tired of London, and would go back to the West directly she heard of his return. "Don't ask me to go any sooner, Malcolm," she said; "the place would seem horrible to me without you. I want your face to be the first to welcome me home. I think sometimes of the days when we shall have our own home, and I shall stand at the gate watching for you."

The Derby-day was a thing of the remote past, and Henley regatta was over, before Elizabeth received notice of Mr. Forde's return. She had seen Lord Paulyne almost daily during the interval, and his friendship had never wavered. He was still her devoted slave, still patient under her scornful speeches, still

eager to gratify her smallest caprice, still a kind of barrier between her and all other worship. Serene in the consciousness of having done her duty, of having, with a fortitude unknown to the common order of womankind, rejected all the advantages of wealth and rank, she saw no peril to herself or her admirer in that frivolous kind of intimacy which she permitted to him. It was an understood thing that she was to be another man's wife—that the end of the season was to be her everlasting farewell to worldly pleasures. Lord Paulyn appeared to accept his position with gentlemanlike resignation. He would even speak of his happier rival sometimes, with but little bitterness, with a good-humoured contempt, as of an inferior order of being. Elizabeth thought he was cured.

Henley regatta and the longest day were over, but the summer was yet in its prime—the nights knew not darkness, only a starry twilight betwixt sundown and sunrise.

“How tired the sun must be by the end of the season,” said Elizabeth, “keeping such late hours, and always glaring down upon races and regattas and flower-shows and garden-parties!”

“Don't pity him: he's such a lazy beggar, and so fond of skulking behind the clouds on rainy days,” answered Lord Paulyn. “I wish we could shuffle out of our engagements as easily as he shirks his.”

Mrs. Cinqmars, who was never happy without some grand event in preparation, had hardly given herself time to breathe after her water-party at Henley—a luncheon for five-and-twenty people on board a gilded barge, towed up the river from Maidenhead—when she was up to her eyes in the arrangement of private theatricals for the tenth of July—a festivity which was to mark the close of her hospitalities.

“We start for Hombourg on the twelfth,” she said, with a sigh; “and as I've been going up like a rocket all the season, I don't want to come down like a stick at the last. So, you see, our theatricals must be a success, Lord Paulyn. It's not to be a common drawing-room business, you know, but a regular affair, for the benefit of the Asylum for the Widows of Indigent Stockbrokers. Tickets a guinea each. A few reserved fauteuils at two guineas.”

“Do you mean to say you're going to let a herd of strangers into your house?” inquired the Viscount with amazement. “Why, you'll have the swell-mob after your plate!”

“The tickets will be only disposed of by our friends, you obtuse creature,” said Mrs. Cinqmars; “but it's not half so much fun acting before a lot of people you see every day, as doing it in real earnest for a benevolent purpose. I shall expect you to sell something like fifty-pounds worth of tickets, and to bring all the heavy swells you can scrape together. I want the affair

to be really brilliant. But this is not the point we have to discuss to-day. Before we can print our programmes or stir a step in the business, we must definitively settle our pieces, and cast them."

This speech was uttered in a friendly little gathering beneath the umbrage of perfumed limes, the river flashing in the foreground, a few of Mrs. Cinqmars' dearest friends, of both sexes—the Viscount, Major Bolding, a young man in the War Office with a tenor voice and light hair parted in the middle, the young lady with raven ringlets, a fair and dumpy young person whose husband was in America, and Elizabeth Luttrell—seated in friendly conclave round a rustic table, provided with pens, ink, and paper; for it is quite impossible to achieve an arrangement of this kind without an immense waste of penmanship and letter-paper. There was the usual confusion of tongues, everybody thinking he or she knew more about private theatricals than any one else—Major Bolding, because the fellows in his regiment had once got up something at Aldershott; the dumpy young person, because she had acted charades with her sisters in the nursery when she was "a mite;" the tenor in the War Office, because his father had known Charles Mathews the elder; the contralto, because she had gone to school with a niece of Mrs. Charles Kean's. Only Elizabeth acknowledged her ignorance. "I know nothing about plays," she said, "except that I doat upon them."

"Whatever play we choose, Lizzie, I mean you to be in it," said Mrs. Cinqmars, and Elizabeth did not protest against the arrangement. She was enraptured at the thought of acting in a play—of living for one brief night the dazzling life of that fairy stage-world which was so new to her.

About a hundred plays were suggested, briefly discussed, and rejected. Mrs. Cinqmars seemed to know every dramatic work that had been written. Every one, except Elizabeth and Mr. Cinqmars, had his or her one idea, by which he or she stuck resolutely. Lord Paulyn voted for *Box and Cox*, and could not be persuaded to extend his ideas beyond that masterpiece. The tenor proposed *To oblige Benson*, because he knew some people who had acted it last Christmas down in Hertfordshire; "and I'm told it went off remarkably well, you know," he said; "and people laughed a good deal, except one old gentleman in the front row, who went to sleep and snored."

"You stupid people!" cried Mrs. Cinqmars; "don't go on harping upon one string. Those are mere insignificant farces, and I want a grand piece that will play two hours and a half."

After this came a string of suggestions, all alike useless.

"I only wish our men were a little better," said Mrs. Cinqmars, with a despondent survey of her forces. "There is a piece

which I should like above all others; but it wants good acting. There are not too many people in it, and no troublesome scenery. I mean *Masks and Faces*."

Every one knew *Masks and Faces*, every one admired the play; but the gentlemen were doubtful as to their capacity for the characters.

"I'll play nothing but Box," said Lord Paulyn; "I think I could do that."

"I don't mind what I do, as long as it's something to make the people laugh," said Major Bolding.

"Then you'd better try tragedy," suggested Mr. Hartley, the tenor.

"They're playing the piece at the Adelphi, Lizzie," said Mrs. Cinqmars, intent upon her own deliberations, and ignoring trivial interruptions. "We'll all go to see it this evening. You shall play Peg Woffington. Major Bolding will do pretty well for Vane. Oh yes, you must do it; I'll coach you. Cinqmars and Mr. Hartley can play Triplet and Colley Cibber; you, Flory"—to the dumpy young person—"will make a capital Kitty Clive; and you, Lord Paulyn, must play Sir Charles Pomander, the villain. I can get a couple of newspaper men for Snarl and Soaper, the two critics. No remonstrances. I know you are all sticks; but we know what great things can be done by a bundle of sticks. You'll all learn your words perfectly without an hour's delay. Never mind the acting. We'll arrange that at rehearsal. The words and the dresses are the two great points. You must all look as if you had walked out of a picture by Ward or Frith. You'll call at the Adelphi this afternoon, Major, and engage half-a-dozen stalls for the rest of the week; and mind, I shall expect to see them occupied every night before the curtain goes up."

After this came a great deal of discussion. Major Bolding declared his incapacity for sentimental comedy; Lord Paulyn insisted that he could soar no higher than Box.

"I don't think I should break down in that business with the mutton-chop and rasher; and if I had plaid trousers with big checks, and a red wig, I think I might make them laugh a little," he said; "but my attempting a stage villain is too absurd. Why, I should have to scowl, shouldn't I, and cork my eyebrows, and drag one foot behind the other when I walked?"

"Nothing of the kind. Sir Charles is a light-comedy villain; only a slight modification of your own haw-haw style. You have only to see the piece acted half-a-dozen times or so. You shall have a wig and costume that will almost play the part for you."

Lord Paulyn groaned aloud. "Sit in a stiflin' hot theatre six nights runnin' to see the same fellers in the same play!" he remonstrated.

"Only a small sacrifice to dramatic art and the indigent stockbrokers' widows," said Mrs. Cinqmars, soothingly.

She was a determined little woman: and once having taken up the business, carried it through with unflinching energy.

The programmes were printed forthwith, on lace-bordered paper of palest rose colour, perfumed to distraction by the art of Rimmel.

Drawing-room Performance

AT THE RANCHO, FULHAM (THE RIVERSIDE VILLA OF
H. DU C. DE CINQMARS, ESQ.),

FOR THE

BENEFIT OF THE WIDOWS OF INDIGENT STOCKBROKERS

(Members of the House alone eligible).

MASKS AND FACES.

A Comedy by CHARLES READE and TOM TAYLOR.

Sir Charles Pomander	Lord PAULYN.
Mr. Vane	Major BOLDING.
Colley Cibber	Mr. HARTLEY.
Triplet	MR. DU CHÂTELET DE CINQMARS.
James Quin	Mr. BEAUMONT.
Snarl	{ Mr. SLASHER.
Soaper } Critics	
Mrs. Vane	MRS. DU CHATELET DE CINQMARS.
Kate Clive	Mrs. DESBOROUGH.
Peg Woffington	Miss ELIZABETH LUTTRELL.

Tickets to be obtained only from the Committee, One Guinea.

A limited Number of Reserved Fauteuils at Two Guineas.

Performance to commence at nine precisely. Carriages may be ordered for half-past eleven.

For five consecutive nights did Mrs. Cinqmars and her devoted slaves occupy the stalls of the Adelphi, gazing upon and listening to the performance of Mrs. Stirling, Mr. Benjamin Webster, and other accomplished masters of the dramatic art. The blood in the veins of the gallant Major ran cold, as the fast-congealing water-drops of an Alpine stream among the frozen mountain tops, when he watched the movements and listened to the words of Mr. Vane, and considered that he, after his feeble fashion, must needs reflect the image of that skilful actor who sustained the part. But by diligent perusal of the comedy in the solitude of their own apartments, and by force of seeing the play five times running, and being urged to attention and inte-

rest by the energetic little stage-manageress who sat between them, the Major on the one side and the Viscount on the other, did ultimately arrive at some idea of what they were expected to do; and when the first rehearsal took place at the Rancho, after the completion of these nightly studies, Mrs. Cinqmars pronounced herself very well satisfied with her company. She had beaten up recruits here and there in the meantime, and had filled her programme. The tickets had been selling furiously. Almost every one had heard of the Rancho; and aspiring middle-class people who did not know Mrs. Cinqmars were glad of this opportunity of placing themselves upon a level with people who did. There was no rush of those lofty personages whom Mrs. Cinqmars had spoken of as "heavy swells." A good deal of solicitation would have been needed to bring these to share the free-and-easy hospitalities of the river-side villa; but society on the lower ranges parted freely with their guineas for gilt-edged tickets of delicate rose-coloured pasteboard, entitling them to behold the mysteries of that notorious abode. Lord Paulyn, hard pressed by the energetic Flora, did contrive to enlist the sympathies of various horsey noblemen in the cause of the stock-brokers' widows—men who were curious, in their own words, to see "how big a fool Paulyn would make of himself"—but stately dowagers or patrician beauties he could gather none. Major Bolding, however, beat up the quarters of wealthy merchants and shipowners, and secured a handsome attendance of diamonds and millinery for the limited number of fauteuils; and although the aspiring soul of Mrs. Cinqmars languished for a more aristocratic assembly, she was tolerably contented with the idea of a gathering which would fill her spacious room, and in outward show would equal the best.

"If one has not what one loves, one must love what one has," said the little woman, flinging back her flowing raven locks with a sigh of resignation. "We've sold all the tickets, and that's a grand point, and we shall have at least a hundred pounds for the widows; odious snuffy old creatures, I daresay, and not worth half the trouble we are taking for them. A thousand thanks, Major, for your exertions in Tyburnia, and to you, Lord Paulyn, for your labours at Tattersall's. I really think we shall make a success. Miss Luttrell is a magnificent Woffington."

"Egad, she'd be magnificent in anything," said the Viscount rapturously, "I always think, if there ever was such a person as Helen, she must have been like Elizabeth Luttrell. She's such an out-and-out beauty. Don't you know in Homer, when he came out on the ramparts where the old men were sitting, though I dare say they'd been abusing her like old boots before he showed up, the moment they saw her they knocked under, and thought a ten years' war was hardly too much to have paid

for the privilege of looking at her. Elizabeth is just that kind of woman. It's no matter how she carries on, a man must adore her."

"I say ditto to Mr. Burke," said the Major.

"It's a pity she should marry a country parson, isn't it?" asked Mrs. Cinqmars, who had been made acquainted with Elizabeth's engagement by the damsel herself, in a moment of confidence.

"Fifty to one against that marriage ever coming off," said the Major; "a pretty girl always begins with a detrimental, just to get her hand in. I daresay those Gunning sisters in King George's time were engaged to some needy beggars before they came up to London, and took the town by storm. I can't fancy Miss Luttrell settling down to the goody-goody kind of life, with a sanctimonious fellow in a white choker."

"No, by Jove!" cried Lord Paulyn, "I can fancy anything sooner than that. But she's just the sort of girl to do anything, however preposterous, if she once sets her mind upon it."

This was a fragment of confidential talk in Mrs. Cinqmars' boudoir, which at this period was littered with court swords, three-cornered hats, flowing periwigs, and other such paraphernalia. The important night came at last, in an interval of tropical weather, the thermometer at eighty-six in the shade, all the greensward in the parks burnt to a dismal tawny hue, arid as a simoom-blasted desert. Heavy insupportable weather, at which Anglo-Indians and other travellers in distant climes, from China to Peru, grumbled sorely, declaring that they had encountered nothing so oppressive as this sultry English heat in Bengal, or Japan, or Lima, or Honolulu, as the case might be. A damp, penetrating heat, as of a gigantic hot-house. London and her wide-spreading suburbs were wrapped in a dim shroud of summer mist, pale and impalpable as the ghost of some dead-and-gone November fog, and all the denizens of the vast city seemed visibly dissolving, as in a Turkish bath. Threatening weather, with the perpetual menace of a thunderstorm impending in the leaden sky.

"It would be rather too bad if the storm were to come to-night," said Mrs. Cinqmars, as she leaned against the embrasure of an open window languidly, after the last rehearsal, which had been prolonged to within a couple of hours of the performance. "But I shouldn't at all wonder if it did. Hark at those horrible little birds twittering, as if they were saying, 'O yes, it will come soon; it can't keep off much longer; I feel it coming.' And how the laurel leaves shiver."

"We've sold the tickets," said the Major philosophically; "the indigent widows will be none the worse off if it rains bucketfuls all the evening."

"Do you think that will reconcile me to our play being a failure?" cried the lady indignantly. "As if those snuffy old things were the first consideration!"

"But you do it for their sakes, you know."

"For their sakes! Do you suppose I pay Madame Noire unheard-of prices for my dresses for their sakes? I shall die of vexation if we've any empty benches."

"We'd better send a whip round to the clubs," said Major Bolding.

"I don't want a herd of men," exclaimed the aggrieved manageress; "I want a brilliant-looking audience,—those Manchester and Liverpool women with their emeralds and diamonds. However, we'd better disperse at once, and begin to think of dressing. Two hours is not too much for putting on Pompadour costumes. Lizzie, you and I will have some tea and cold chicken in my room, if we can manage to eat; and as for you, gentlemen, there will be dinner in half-an-hour in Mr. Cinqmars' study. All the other rooms are confiscated to the interests of the widows."

"Are the widows to see us act?" inquired Mr. Hartley. "They ought, I think, in order to appreciate the effort we are making for them at its just value. It would be rather a clever move, by the way, a row of old women in black bonnets. Mrs. Cinqmars could point to them when she speaks her little epilogue: 'Behold, kind friends, the recipients of your bounty.'"

"It will be quite enough to speak of them. And now, gentlemen, if you really mean to be dressed by nine o'clock, you'd better go to your rooms. Du Châtelet, be sure you come to me at a quarter to nine to go over your scenes for the very last time."

Du Châtelet groaned. He was the Triplet of the piece, and had sorely toiled in his laudable desire to reproduce the looks and tones of Mr. Webster. He had even sacrificed a handsome black moustache, which he felt to be a costly offering, on the shrine of Art.

It was nine o'clock, and the storm was still impending—still spreading its dark curtain between earth and the stars. But it had not come, and carriage after carriage, the chariots of Tyburnia and Ecclestonia, rolled round the gravel sweep before the broad portico of the Rancho. The *foyer* filled rapidly, with a pleasant rustling of silks and satins, a fluttering of plumes, and flashing of jewels, until the half-dozen rows of luxurious seats became a very flower-garden, the brilliant colours of the more costly sex only agreeably toned by the puritan garb of man.

The billiard-room had been fitted up as an auditorium, and by a skilful removal of the vast window which filled one end of the room, and opened on the garden, the apartment had been ex-

tended into a temporary shed beyond, This shed, with gently-sloping floor and sunk foot-lights, was the stage. The frame of the window, wreathed with flowering creepers which seemed to have grown up after the fashion of the famous beanstalk, formed the proscenium.

The brilliant light in the auditorium sank gently to a semi-darkness as the band, hidden in a little off-room, attacked the overture to *Masaniello*. People had just time enough to look about them before the lights went down, the women surveying one another's dresses, the men looking about for people they knew. Mrs. Cinqmars beheld her audience through a hole in the curtain, which Major Bolding had made with his penknife for her convenience, and was satisfied.

"They look very well, don't they?" she asked. "You'd hardly think they were not the real thing—not hall-marked—only electro-plated."

Mrs. Chevenix occupied one of the fauteuils, in a cool and somewhat juvenile costume of pale-gray silk and areophane, with pink ribbons, and a blonde Marie-Stuart cap surmounted with pink marabouts, pink marabouts edging her fan, pink swansdown on her gloves. Her own dress was new and had cost money, but the cost thereof was as nothing compared with the expense of Elizabeth's satin train and point-lace-flounced petticoat, and the powdered wig which was to make her look like Madame de Pompadour in Boucher's famous picture. Yet all this expenditure had the devoted aunt borne without grumbling, or only an occasional faint and plaintive sigh.

If there were sufficient recompense for this outlay in Elizabeth's triumph, Mrs. Chevenix received such recompense without stint. From the first moment to the last of that performance the girl was triumphant, resplendent with beauty and genius, giving her whole heart and soul to the magic of the stage, living, breathing, thinking, as Peg Woffington. The mediocrity of her fellow-actors mattered nothing to her. They spoke the words they had to speak, so that no hitch arose in the stage business, and that was all she needed to sustain the illusion of the scene. There was passion enough and force enough in her own soul to have animated a theatre; there was an electricity as subtle as the electricity in the overcharged atmosphere, a magnetic force which inspired and excited, instead of depressing.

Mrs. Cinqmars revelled in the sentimentalities of Mabel Vane; rolled her large eyes and flung about her superb hair—she would wear no wig to conceal that natural abundance—to her heart's content, and made a graceful little heroine of the lachrymose school. But Elizabeth was the very creature one could fancy Margaret Woffington in her prime—the generous,

reckless, audacious beauty, proud of her power over the hearts of men, brimming over with life and genius, but with unfathomable depths of tenderness lurking beneath that brilliant surface.

Tyburnia and Ecclestonia, and all the men about town who formed the staple of Mr. and Mrs. Cinqmars' set, applauded with a unanimity that for once in a way came from the heart. They felt that this was verily dramatic art, hardly the less finished because it was the fruit of only a fortnight's study. The actress had picked up the technicalities of her part during those studious nights in the theatre; inspiration and a fresh and ardent love of art had done the rest, and the impersonation was as perfect as any amateur performance can possibly be, with all the added charm of freshness and sincerity which can hardly accompany the profound experience of professional training. An actress who had trodden the beaten round of the drama, more or less like a horse in a mill, could surely never fling herself with such passionate feeling into one part as this girl, to whom the magic of the stage was new.

Mr. Cinqmars quavered and sniffed and snivelled in the character of Triplet, with an abject senility which would have been senile in a great-grandfather of ninety, but copied the stage business with some dexterity, and won his share of applause. Lord Paulyn and Major Bolding were dressed superbly, and managed to get through their work with credit to themselves and the stage-manageress; and as coffee and Neapolitan ices were lavishly administered between the two acts, without any toll being exacted thereupon for the widows, the aristocracy of commerce in the two-guinea fauteuils were inclined to think they had received fair value for their money. As for the herd of young men who blocked the back of the auditorium, where there was little more than standing room, they were simply in ecstasies. The girl's beauty and genius fired their souls. They protested vehemently that she ought to go on the stage, that she would take the town by storm, and much more to the same effect; forgetting that this flame which burned so brilliantly to-night might be only a meteoric light, and that although a clever young woman, with an ardent nature, may for once in her life fling herself heart and soul into a stage-play, and by a kind of inspiration dispense with the comprehension and experience that can only come from professional training, it is no reason she should be able to repeat her triumph, and to go on repeating it *ad libitum*. Never again in Elizabeth Luttrell's existence was she to live the delicious life of the stage, to lose the sense of her personality in the playwright's creation, to act and think and be glad and sorry with an imaginary creature, the centre of an imaginary world.

Among the crowd of white neckties and swallow-tailed coats

at the end of the room, there was one gentleman who stood near the door, with his back against the wall, a tall immovable figure, and who seemed to know nobody. He was taller by half a head than the majority of the men standing in the crowded space behind the last row of seats, and he was able to survey the stage across the carefully-parted hair of the gentleman in front of him. This gentleman had a good deal to say about Elizabeth Luttrell, to which the stranger listened intently, with a somewhat moody countenance.

"Yes," said this fopling to his friend, in the interval between the second and third act—the stranger had only entered the room towards the close of the second—"yes, it's a great match for her, of course; only a country parson's daughter, without a sixpence, except anything she may get from her aunt, Mrs. Chevenix, the widow of a man who was a bishop, or a judge, or something——"

"Is it a settled thing?" asked the other.

"Of course it is. Why, they go everywhere together. I was introduced to her at the Derby; he drove her down in his drag with Mrs. Cinqmars to play Propriety, on the *obscurum facere per obscurius* principle, I suppose. And you'll find him here continually, dancing attendance upon Miss Luttrell, and spooning to an extent that is humiliating to one's sense of manhood."

"I didn't think that was in Paulyn's line; I thought he went in for race-horses and prize yachts, and that kind of thing."

"Yes; there's the rub. This is his first appearance in the character of a love-sick swain; and like a patient who takes the measles late in life, he exhibits the disease in its most aggravated form."

"There's not much in him at the best of times," said the other, with the air of a man whose own intellectual gifts were of the highest order, and who therefore surveyed mankind from an altitude. "Do you think she likes him?"

"Do I think she is in full possession of her senses?" answered his friend, laughing; "and that, being so, she would be likely to turn up her nose at such a position as he can give her? There's hardly a richer man than Paulyn about town—bar the Marquis of Westminster. The love of money is an hereditary vice in his family, and his ancestors have scraped and hoarded from generation to generation. He is one of the few gentlemen who contrive to make money on the turf. The bookmen hate him like poison. He's a lamb they seldom have the privilege of skinning. There isn't a deeper card out; and I can't say I envy that lovely girl the life she's likely to lead with him, when she's his own property and he gets tired of spooning. But for all that I don't believe there's a girl in London would have refused him."

Pleasant intelligence this for the tall stranger, whose name was Malcolm Forde.

CHAPTER V.

“ Et je songeais comme la femme oubliée,
Et je sentais un lambeau de ma vie
Qui se déchirait lentement.”

MR. FORDE had come up from Scotland on the tenth of July, intending to surprise Elizabeth by his unexpected appearance in Eaton-place. He had fancied her bright look of rapture as she came into the room and saw him, after having been told only that a gentleman from Hawleigh wished to see her—the look she had given him so many times during the brief happy fortnight that followed their betrothal; those happy days in which they had enjoyed for but too short a space the privileges of plighted lovers, had walked alone together on the dull March afternoon, when the Curate's labours allowed him such a blessed interval, and had talked of the future they were to share—a lowly destiny, but with the light of true love shining upon it.

Thus had he thought of his betrothed during the tedious journey from the North, tedious though he travelled express for the greater part of the way. He came fresh from the performance of a mournful duty, for only two days ago he had read the funeral service above the remains of his father's brother, the bachelor uncle who had been almost a second father to him. He had not even written to tell Elizabeth of his uncle's death. It would be easier to tell her when they met. He had made all his plans. He meant to stay in London for a few days, while Elizabeth wound up her visit, and then to take her back to Devonshire with him. And then it would be time to think of their wedding-day. He was richer by some four hundred a year since his uncle's death, and he had lately received the offer of a very fair living in the north of England. Since he had surrendered his old heroic idea of his ministry, and had determined that his lines were to be cast in pleasant places, there was really nothing to hinder the realisation of his wishes.

Only when he was rattling along in a cab between Euston-square and Eaton-place did he bethink himself that Elizabeth would, in all probability, be out. It was nearly nine o'clock, and she went out so much, as her letters informed him. He could hardly hope to be so fortunate as to find her at home. And then he reproached himself for this childish foolishness of his in wishing to surprise her, instead of telegraphing the announcement of his advent, as a sensible man would have done.

“Do love and folly always go hand in hand?” he wondered.

His forebodings of disappointment were fully realised. “Not at home,” said Mrs. Chevenix’s single-handed indoor servant, a man whose pompous bearing might have impressed strangers with the idea that he had an under-butler and a staff of accomplished footmen for his vassals. “Not expected home till late this evening.”

Mr. Forde had alighted from his cab, and stood in the stuccoed porch despondent.

“Have you any idea where they’re gone?” he asked.

Any idea indeed! Why, the butler was as familiar with his mistress’s engagements as that lady herself.

“They are gone to the hamachure theatricals at the Rancho, Mr. Cinkmarsh’s place, at Fulham.”

“Amateur theatricals!” repeated Malcolm hopelessly.

“Yes, replied the butler, who was of a communicative disposition; “my missus’s niece, Miss Luttrell, hacks the principal character; and my missus’s maid, as has seen her rehearsalling, and has gone down to dress her this evening, says she do hack wonderful, jest like the regular thing, only not so low. It’s a pity you didn’t buy a ticket, sir, as you’re a friend of the fambly.”

Private theatricals, and his wife-elect the centre of observation! He was not strait-laced or puritanical in his ideas, but this performance hardly seemed to him in harmony with the part she had elected to play in the drama of life. But she had been minded to taste the cup of pleasure, and she was evidently drinking its strongest waters. She had told him nothing of these amateur theatricals—a curious reticence.

“Buy a ticket,” he repeated, echoing the friendly butler. “Do you mean that tickets have been sold? It is a public business, then?”

“Well, sir, it is and it isn’t, as you may say. The performance is for the benefick of a charitable institooshun—the hindignant widows, and Mrs. Cinkmarsh have kindly lent her ’ouse for the occasion, and the tickets have been only sold by the committee, so you see it’s public from one pint of view, and private from the other.”

“Where could I get a ticket?” asked the Curate moodily. This public exhibition, this playing at charity, was just the very last thing he could have desired for his future wife, just the very thing he would have forbidden at any cost had he been afforded the opportunity of forbidding it.

“And to keep it hidden from me,” he thought; “a bad beginning for that perfect trust which was to reign between us.”

“I don’t know as you could get one anywhere’s to-night, sir,” replied the butler thoughtfully, “unless I was to get it for you.”

My missus is on the committee, and I know she had a lot of tickets to sell, and kep 'em up to yesterday in a china basket in the drawring-room. If they're there still, I might take the liberty of gettin' one for you; bein' for a charitable purpose, I don't think missus would object to my disposin' of one."

"Get me one, then, like a good fellow."

"The tickets are a guinea heach," said the butler doubtfully, thinking this eager gentleman might ask for credit.

Mr. Forde took a handful of loose money from his pocket.

"Here are thirty shillings," he said; "a guinea for the ticket, and the balance for your trouble."

The man was gratified by this donation, for in these degenerate days vails are an uncertain quantity. He produced the ticket speedily, instructed Mr. Forde as to the nearest way to the Rancho, guarded the wheel of the hansom as he got into it, and delivered the Curate's address to the charioteer with as grand an air as if he had been instructing the coachman of an archbishop.

"British Hotel, Cockspur-street," he said, and thither Mr. Forde was driven by way of Belgrave-square and Birdcage-walk. A *nota bene* on the gilt-edged ticket informed him that full dress was indispensable.

He dined hastily in the deserted coffee-room—a sorry dinner, for he was in that frame of mind in which dining is the most dismal mockery—a mere sacrifice to the conventionalities—dined, and then went to his room and dressed hurriedly, with his thoughts strangely disturbed by this trivial business of the private theatricals.

But it was not trivial—for Elizabeth's reticence had been a tacit deception—it was not trivial—for unless she had been utterly wanting in love's truthful instinct, she must have known that this public exhibition of herself would be of all things the most hateful to him.

He was not a tyrant—he had never meant to tyrannise over this fair young creature who had made him love her, in very spite of his own will. But he had meant to mould her into the shape of his still fairer ideal—the woman whose claim to manly worship was something higher than the splendour of her eyes or the golden glory of her hair—the perfect woman, nobly planned. He had fondly hoped that in Elizabeth there was the material for such a woman—that he had only to play the sculptor in order to develop undreamt-of graces from this peerless block of marble.

There were some letters waiting for him at the British—letters which had been sent on from Lenorgie, where they arrived after his departure. He had spent the day and night after the funeral with a friend in Edinburgh, where he had business to transact.

Two were mere business epistles; the third was in a hand that was strange to him—rather a singular hand, with straight up and down letters, but of an angular scratchy type, which he felt must be feminine. It bore the post-mark of Hawleigh. It was that snake in the grass, an anonymous letter.

“Mr. Forde will be perhaps surprised to learn that Miss Luttrell has given much encouragement to an aristocratic admirer during her stay in London. She has been seen on the front seat of Lord Paulyn’s four-in-hand, returning from Epsom races: a circumstance which has occasioned some talk among the strait-laced inhabitants of Hawleigh. This friendly hint is sent by a sincere well-wisher.

“Hawleigh, July 7th.”

“An aristocratic admirer—Lord Paulyn! She has suffered her name to be associated with his so much as to give an excuse for this venomous scrawl! I will not believe it. The venom is self-engendered. This vile letter is from some envious woman who hates her for all the gifts that render her so much more charming than other women.”

He crushed the venomous scrawl in his strong hand, and thrust it into the depths of a remote pocket. Yet, however mean the spirit of the anonymous slanderer, however contemptible the slander, it stung him not the less, as such venom does sting, in spite of himself.

“I shall see her face to face,” he thought, “in an hour or two—shall be able to scold her for her folly, and take her to my heart for her penitence; and be angry with her, and forgive her, and adore her in the space of a minute; and I shall see the scorn in her proud eyes when I tell her she has been accused of encouraging my rival.”

The drive to the Rancho gave Mr. Forde ample leisure for thought; for going over and over the same ground with an agonising repetition of the same ideas; for the amplification of those vague doubts, those little clouds in love’s heaven, no bigger than a man’s hand, until they grew wide enough to darken all the horizon. The shades of Fulham seemed endless. He stopped the driver more than once to ask if he were not going wrong; but the man told him No: he knew Bishop’s-lane well enough, close agen Putney-bridge; and the locality of the Rancho, as indicated by Mr. Forde’s ticket, was Bishop’s-lane

They drove into the lane at last, a dismal by-road between high walls, just wide enough for a couple of carriages to pass each other, with imminent peril of grazing the wheels or the horses against a wall. One could hardly have expected to find a suburban paradise in such a neighbourhood; and in spite of

his preoccupation, Mr. Forde looked about him with surprise as the hansom dashed in at an open gateway, made a swift circuit of a dark shrubbery of almost tropical luxuriance, and anon drew up before a long low house, lighted like a fairy palace.

He gave his ticket to a functionary who looked like a professional boxkeeper, and was admitted to a spacious chamber filled to overflowing with a fashionable-looking audience. The play was more than half over—there was only standing-room—and the central figure of the group on the brilliantly-lighted stage, the focus of every eye, was the girl he loved—the perfect woman, nobly planned, &c.

He was but mortal, so he could not withhold his admiration of her grace and beauty, and was half-inclined to forgive her because she was so lovely and gracious a creature. Then the curtain fell at the close of the second act, and the men in front of him began to talk of her, and he heard what the world thought of Elizabeth Luttrell.

The blow almost stunned him. He heard much more than has been recorded: heard how men talked of his perfect woman; heard Mrs. Chevenix's manœuvres freely discussed, and Elizabeth's co-operation in all the matron's schemes spoken of as an established fact. His first and almost irresistible impulse was to knock the slanderers down. He felt as unregenerately-minded upon this point as if he had come fresh from the mess-table, his brain fired with wine and laughter. But he conquered the inclination, and stood quietly by, and heard from the lips of some half-dozen speakers what the world thought of the woman he loved. It was not that anything specially ill-natured was said; the men hardly knew that their remarks were derogatory to womanly dignity. It was their way of discussing such topics. But for Malcolm Forde it meant the ruin of that new scheme of life which he had made for himself. The airy fabric built by hope and love perished, like an enchanted city that melts into thin air at the breaking of a spell. He did not for a moment suspend his judgment, did not stay his wrath to consider how much or how little justification there might be for this careless talk.

These men spoke of facts—spoke of Elizabeth's engagement to the Viscount as a fact concerning which there could be no doubt. And she had doubtless given them ample justification for this idea. She had been constantly seen in his society. He "spooning"—odious word!—in a manner that made his passion obvious to the eyes of all men.

Could he take this woman—her purity for ever tarnished by such contact—home to his heart? Was such a woman—who, with her faith plighted to him, could surrender herself to all the follies of the town, and link her name with yonder profligate—

was such a woman worthy of the sacrifice he had been prepared to make for her—the sacrifice of the entire scheme of his life; theory and practice alike abandoned for her sake?

“She would have made me a sensuous fool,” he thought; “content to dawdle through life as her father has done, living at my ease, and making coals and beef and blankets the substitute for earnest labour among my flock. What might she not have made of me if my eyes had not been opened in time? I loved her so weakly.”

He put his passion already in the past tense. He had no thought of the possibility of his forgiving the woman who had deceived him so basely.

“Of course she meant all the time to marry Lord Paulyn, if he proposed to her. But in the mean while, for the mere amusement of an idle hour, she made love to me,” he thought bitterly, remembering that nothing had been farther from his thoughts than proposing to Elizabeth when she laid in wait for him that March night, and cut off his retreat for ever with the fatal magic of her beauty, and the tones and looks that went straight to his heart.

He must see her as soon as the play was over, must cast her out of his life at once and for ever, must make a swift sudden end of every link between them.

“I might write to her,” he thought; “but perhaps it would be better for us to meet once more face to face. If it is possible for her to justify herself she shall not be without the opportunity for such justification. But I know that it is impossible.”

When the curtain had fallen for the last time, and Elizabeth had curtseyed her acknowledgment of a shower of bouquets, and the enthusiasm in the parterre was still at its apogee, Mr. Forde departed. Not to-night would he break in upon her new existence. Let her taste all the delights of her triumph. To-morrow would be time enough for the few quiet words that were needed for his eternal severance from the woman he had loved.

CHAPTER VI.

“Since there’s no help, come, let us kiss and part:

 Nay, I have done; you get no more of me;

And I am glad, yea, glad with all my heart,

 That thus so cleanly I myself can free;

Shake hands for ever, cancel all our vows,

 And when we meet at any time again,

Be it not seen in either of our brows

 That we one jot of former love retain.”

ELIZABETH was sitting alone in the shady back drawing-room on the morning after her triumph, carelessly robed in white muslin,

pale, exhausted, languid as the lady in Hogarth's "Marriage à la Mode." Mrs. Chevenix was recruiting her forces, mental and physical, by prolonged and placid slumbers; but Elizabeth was not of the order of being who can sleep off the fumes of dissipation so easily. Her brief night had been a perpetual fever; the voice of adulation still in her ears; the lights, the faces of the crowd, still before her dazzled eyes; the passion and feeling of Peg Woffington still racking her heart. "I wonder actresses don't all die young," she thought, as she tossed her weary head from side to side, vainly seeking slumber's calm haven.

Now she was lying on the sofa, prostrate, an unread novel in her hand, a cup of tea on a tiny table by her side, a fan and scent-bottle close at hand, for she had taken to her aunt's manner of sustaining life in its feebler moments.

She threw aside her novel presently, and unfurled her fan.

"I wish I were really an actress," she thought; "that would be a life worth living: to hear that thunder of applause every night, to see every eye fixed upon one, a vast audience listening with a breathless air: and to move in a strange world—a world of dreams—and to love, and suffer, and despair, and rejoice, within the compass of a couple of hours. Yes, that is life!"

She smiled to herself as she wondered what her lover would think of such a life.

"I shall tell him all about it now that it is over," she said to herself. "If I had told him before he would have given his veto against the whole business, I daresay. But he can hardly be very angry when I make a full confession of my misdemeanour, especially as it was for a charity. And I think he will be a little proud of my success, in spite of himself."

There had been a dance at the Rancho after the general public had dispersed, and Elizabeth had been the star of the evening, the object of everybody's outspoken admiration. All the performers had been praised, of course—Mr. Cinqmars for his life-like rendering of Triplet, in which personation he was declared by some enthusiastic friends to have rivalled Webster and Lemaitre; Mrs. Cinqmars for her pathos and charming appearance as Mabel Vane; Lord Paulyn and the Major for their several merits; but no one attempted to disguise the fact that Elizabeth's had been the crowning triumph. Enthusiastic young men told her that she ought to go on the stage, that she would take the town by storm, and make ten thousand a year, and so on. Lord Paulyn told her—but that was only a repetition of what he had told her before.

"You promised you would never speak of that subject again," she said.

It was in a waltz, as they were whirling round to the *Soldaten Lieder*.

"I shall speak of it till my dying day," he said. "Yes, if it makes you ever so angry. Remember what I told you. I swore an oath the day I saw you first."

"I will never dance with you again."

"O yes, you will. But I tell you what you will never do: you will never marry that parson fellow. It isn't possible that, after having seen what the world is, and your own capacity for shining in it, you could lead such a life as you'd have to lead with him."

"Ah, that's because you don't know how much I love him," the girl answered, with a radiant look. "I'd rather be shut up in a convent, like Heloise, and exist upon an occasional letter from him, than have all the pleasures of the world without him."

"Bosh!" said the Viscount bluntly. "A week of the convent would make you tell another story. Your fancy for this man is one of your caprices: and Heaven knows you are about the most capricious woman in the world. You like him because every one is opposed to your marrying him—because it's about the maddest, most suicidal thing you could do."

"I'm tired," said Elizabeth; "take me to a seat, please."

And having once released herself from him, she took care that Lord Paulyn should have no farther speech with her that night.

She thought of his impertinences this morning, as she lay on the sofa listlessly fanning herself; thought of his obstinate pursuit of her; and thought—with some touch of pride in her own superiority to sordid considerations—how very few young women in her position would have held out against such a siege.

She was in the midst of a half-stifed yawn when the pompous butler opened the door in his grand sweeping way, and announced, "Mr. Forde."

She sprang to her feet, her heart beating violently, her tired eyes brightening with sudden joy, and seemed as if, forgetful of the scarcely departed butler, she would have flung herself into her lover's arms.

Her lover! Alas, was that a lover whose grave eyes met hers with so cold a gaze? She drew back, appalled by that strange look.

"Malcolm!" she cried, "what is the matter?"

"There is so much the matter, Miss Luttrell, that I have hesitated this morning as to whether I should write you a brief note of farewell, or come here to bid you my last good-bye in person."

The girl drew herself up with her queenliest air, Trembling with a strange inward shiver, sick at heart, cold as death, she yet faced him resolutely; ready to see the ship that carried all her freight of hope and gladness go down to the bottom of the ocean without one cry of despair.

"It was at least polite to call," she said, loftily. "May I ask what has caused this abrupt change in your plans?"

"I think it is scarcely needful for you to inquire. But I have no wish to be otherwise than outspoken. I was at your friend's house last night, and saw you."

"I hope you were not very much shocked by what you saw."

Not for worlds would she now have apologised for her conduct, or explained that she had intended to tell him all about the amateur performance at the Rancho when it was over.

"I might have forgiven what I saw; though, if you had known my mind in the least, you must have known how unwelcome such an exhibition would be to me."

"Did I play my part so very badly, then?" she asked, with a little offended laugh, womanly vanity asserting itself even in the midst of her anguish. "Did I make so great a fool of myself?"

He took no notice of the inquiry, but went on, with suppressed passion, standing before her, his broad muscular hand grasping the back of one of Mrs. Chevenix's fragile chairs, which trembled under the pressure.

"I heard your attractions, your opportunities, your future, discussed very freely between the acts of your comedy. I heard of your engagement to Lord Paulyn."

"My engagement to Lord Paulyn!" she cried, staring at him with widening eyes.

"Yes; a fact which I found confirmed this morning by one of the newspapers in the coffee-room where I breakfasted."

He gave her a copy of the *Court Journal*.

"You will see your name there among the announcements of impending marriages in high life. 'A marriage is on the tapis between Lord Paulyn and Miss Luttrell, daughter of the Rev Wilmot Luttrell, vicar of Hawleigh.' It was rather hard that you should allow the court newsman to be wiser than I."

Eager words of denial trembled on her lips, but, before they could be spoken, pride silenced her. What! he came to her in this ruthless fashion, came with his course resolved, and resigned her as coolly as if she were a prize not worth contesting.

"You have come here to—to give me up," she said.

"I have resigned myself to circumstances. But would it not have been as well to be off with the old love before you were on with the new? It is a matter of little consequence, perhaps, to the new love; but it is not quite fair to the old."

"You have not taken the trouble to think that this paragraph might be a newsmonger's unlicensed gossip, as meaningless as the talk you may have heard last night."

He looked at her earnestly. No, there was neither penitence nor love in that cold beautiful face, only pride and anger. Was

it the same face that had looked at him passionately in the moonlight four months ago? Was this the woman who had almost offered him her love?

“Even if this announcement is somewhat premature, I have learned enough to know that it is only premature, that it must come in due course, unless, indeed, you are more reckless of your reputation than I could have supposed it possible for your father’s daughter to be. Your name has been too long associated with Lord Paulyn’s to admit of any termination but one to your acquaintance. For your own sake, I recommend you to marry him.”

“I am hardly likely to despise such generous advice. If you had ever loved me,” with a sudden burst of passion, “you could not talk to me like this.”

“I have loved you well enough to falsify the whole scheme of my life, to sacrifice the dearest wish of my mind——”

“But it was such an unwilling sacrifice,” exclaimed Elizabeth, bitterly. “God forbid that I should profit by it!”

“God only knows how much I have loved you, Elizabeth; for He alone knows the strength of my temptation, and the weakness of my soul. But you—you were only playing at love; and the romantic ardour which you assumed, with so fatal a charm, was so factitious a sentiment that it could not weigh for a single hour against your love of pleasure, or stand between your ambition and its object for a single day. Let it pass, with that dead past to which it belongs. The dream was sweet enough while it lasted; but it was only a dream, and it has gone ‘like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors.’”

She stood like a statue, hardening her heart against him. What, when all the world—the world as represented by Lord Paulyn and society at the Rancho—was at her feet, did he cast her off so lightly, without allowing her any fair opportunity of justifying herself? For it was hardly to be supposed that she would kiss the dust beneath his feet, as it were, confessing her sins, and supplicating his pardon.

What had she done? Only enjoyed her life for this one brief summer-time, holding his image in her heart of hearts all the while. Yes, in the very whirlpool of pleasure looking upward at him, as at a star seen from the depths of a storm-darkened sea. And she had refused Park-lane, Cowes, Ashcombe, and two more country-seats for his sake.

Should she tell him of her rejection of Lord Paulyn—tell him that one incontrovertible fact which must reinstate her at once and for ever in his esteem? What, tell him this when he spoke of his love as a thing of the past, a dream that he had dreamed and done with, a snare which he had happily escaped, regaining his liberty of election, his freedom for that grander life in which

human love had no part? What, sue again for his love, lay bare her passionate heart, again overstep the boundary line of womanly modesty, remind him how she had been the first to love, almost the first to declare her love? Had he not this moment reminded her, inferentially, of that most humiliating fact?

Thus argued pride, and sealed her lips. Hope spoke still louder. Let him talk as he might, he loved her, and could no more live without her than she could exist, a reasonable creature, without him. Let him leave her; let him renounce her. He would come back again, would be at her feet pleading for forgiveness, himself the acknowledged sinner, his the humiliation.

In that brief happy courtship, in those twilit rambles on the outskirts of Hawleigh, when for one delicious hour in the day they had been all the world to each other, Malcolm had laid his heart bare before her, had confessed all the anguish that his efforts not to adore her had cost him.

"I have heard of men making as strong a stand against infidelity," he said; "but I doubt if any man ever before fought so hard a fight against a sinless love."

"I must be very horrid," the girl answered, in her frivolous way, "or you would scarcely have taken so much trouble to shut the door of your heart against me."

"You are all that is lovely and adorable," he said; "but I had made up my mind to be a Francis Xavier on a small scale, and you came between me and my cherished dreams."

She remembered these things to-day, as she stood, with locked lips and cold scornful eyes, confronting him, resolved that from him alone should come the first attempt at reconciliation.

"Having renounced me," she said at last, after a pause, in which he had waited, Heaven knows with what passionate eagerness, for any denial or supplication from her, "in so deliberate and decisive a manner, I conclude you have nothing more to say—except, indeed, to tell me to what address I shall send your letters and presents."

This home-thrust she fancied must needs bring him to his senses.

"Destroy them all!" he cried savagely. "They are the memorials of a most miserable infatuation."

"As you please," she answered coolly, preserving that outward semblance of an unshaken spirit to the last, acting her part of indifference and disdain far better than he played his. Had she not her experience of last night to help her? This morning's interview was no whit the less a scenic display—an actress's representation of supreme calm, with the strong tide of a woman's passion swelling and beating in her stormy breast all the while.

"Then there is nothing more," he said quietly, but with the quietness of suppressed passion, and with no attempt to conceal his emotion, only trying to carry himself manfully in spite thereof, "except for us to say good-bye. Let it be a friendly farewell, Elizabeth, for it is likely to be a long one."

She looked at him curiously. That was hardly the tone of a man who meant to retrace his steps—to leave her in anger to-day, only to come back to her repentant to-morrow. No, there was no room to doubt his earnestness. He did mean this farewell to be irrevocable—this parting for ever and ever. It was only when he had turned his back upon her—when the door was shut between them—that he would discover how impossible it was for them to live apart.

"There must be some reciprocity in these things," she thought; "he could not be so much to me—a part of my very life—and I nothing to him. He must come back to me."

He held out his hand, and she gave him hers, and suffered it to remain helpless, unresisting, in his strong grasp, while he spoke to her.

"Elizabeth," he said, "there are some things very hard to forgive. It is hard for me to forgive you the delusive joys of the last few months—the deep delight I felt that March night when for the first time in my life passionate love had full mastery over my heart, and all the world seemed to begin and end in you. It is bitter to look back upon that hour to-day, and I know that I was the veriest slave of a delusion—the blindest fool of a woman's idle fancy. But I did not come here to reproach you. The dream is past. You might have spared me the sharpness of this sudden waking; but even that I will try to forgive you. Good-bye."

He looked at her with a sad strange smile, the firm lips set in their old resolute curve, but with an unwonted tenderness in the earnest eyes.

"Good-bye," he repeated; "let me kiss you once more at parting, even if I kiss Lord Paulyn's plighted wife."

He took her in his arms, she coldly submissive, with an almost apathetic air. Was it not time for her to speak, to justify herself, to declare that there was no stranger in all that wide city farther from her heart than Reginald Paulyn? No, answered pride; it would be time enough to enlighten him when he came back to her to-morrow and sued for pardon. She would not defend herself—she would not stoop to be forgiven. Had she not humiliated herself too much already for his sake, when she gave him the love he had never asked?

"This time I will hold my own against him," she thought; "I will not be for ever humbling myself in the very dust at his feet. From the beginning I have loved him with too slavish a love."

He touched her forehead with his lips—the passionless kiss of forgiveness for a great wrong. It was the ruin of his air-built castle of earthly hope for which he pardoned her in that last kiss. Before him, wide and far-reaching as the summer sea that he had looked upon a few days ago from a grassy peak among the Pentlands, stretched a nobler prospect, a grander future than her love could ever have helped him to win, and hopes that were not earth-bound. Surely he was resigning very little in this surrender of the one woman he had loved with a love beyond control. And yet the parting tore his heart-strings as they had never been strained before—not even when he stood by the death-bed of Alice Fraser.

“I am not destined to be fortunate in my loves,” he said bitterly, the memory of that older anguish mingling curiously with his pain to-day; “let me try to hope that I have a better destiny than mere earthly happiness.”

The qualifying adjective jarred a little upon her ear. He had always set her so low; he had always loved her grudgingly, with a reservation of his better self, giving her only half his heart at best.

“You have been a great deal too good for me,” she said with exceeding bitterness, “and you have taken care that I should feel your superiority. It is not given to every woman to be like your first love—‘simply perfect;’ and I have some reason to be grateful to those worldly-minded people who are willing to accept me for what I am.”

“Lord Paulyn, for instance,” said Mr. Forde, becoming very worldly-minded in a moment, his eyes lighting up angrily—“Lord Paulyn, who has made his adoration of you a fact notorious to all the world.”

“It is something to have one constant admirer. Lord Paulyn is at least not ashamed of admiring me. He does not fight against the sentiment, as a weakness unworthy of his manhood. He does not feel himself degraded by his attachment.”

This sounded like a direct avowal of the Viscount’s affection, and of her acceptance thereof; surely no woman would speak in this manner except of an accepted lover. If Malcolm Forde had fondly hoped for denial—for a tardy attempt at justification—this unqualified admission was sufficient to enlighten him.

“I did not come here to bandy words, Miss Luttrell,” he said, drawing himself up stiffly; “but I will not leave you without repeating a warning I gave you once before. If you set any value upon your peace on earth, or your fitness for heaven, since a woman is in some measure the slave of her surroundings, do not marry Lord Paulyn. I am not apt to go in the way of scandal, but I have heard enough of his career to justify me

in declaring that union with him would be the quickest road that you could take to life-long misery."

"Yet you advised me just now to marry him. Rather inconsistent, is it not?"

"Anger is always inconsistent. It was passion that spoke then, it is reason that pleads now. Do not let foolish friends persuade you to your ruin, Miss Luttrell. Your beauty may win as good a position as Lord Paulyu can give you from a much better man, if you are patient, and wait a little while for that brilliant establishment which you have no doubt been taught to consider the summit of earthly felicity."

"Your advice is as insulting as—as every word you have said this morning," cried Elizabeth, in a burst of passion.

"Forgive me," he said with extreme gentleness. "I did wrong to speak bitterly. It is not your fault if you have been schooled by worldly teachers. Believe me, it was of your own welfare, your future on this earth and in the world beyond, I was thinking. O Elizabeth, I know that it is in your power to become a good woman; that it is in your nature to be pure and noble. It is only your surroundings that are false. Let my last memory of you be one of peace and friendship, and let your memory of me be of one who once dearly loved you, and to the last had your happiness at heart."

His softened tone set her heart beating with a new hope. That phrase, "once loved you," froze it again, and held her silent as death. A dull blank shadow crept over her face; she stood looking at the ground only just able to stand. When she looked up, with a blinding mist before her eyes, he was gone. And dimly perceiving the empty space which he had filled, and feeling in a moment that he had vanished out of her life for ever, the numbness of despair came over her, and she fell senseless across the spot where he had stood.

CHAPTER VII.

"The good explore,
For peace, those realms where guilt can never soar;
The proud, the wayward, who have fix'd below
Their joy, and find this earth enough for woe,
Lose in that one their all—perchance a mite—
But who in patience parts with all delight?"

Mrs. CHEVENIX, descending to her drawing-room in state,—after the restorative effects of a leisurely breakfast in bed, and a gradual and easy toilet; her dress prepared for the reception of

morning callers; her complexion refreshed with violet powder,— was horrified at finding her niece prostrate on the threshold of the back drawing-room. But when Mrs. Chevenix and her maid had administered the usual remedies with a good deal of rushing to and fro, and the girl's haggard eyes reopened on the outer world, her first care was to assure them that the fainting fit was of no importance. She had been a little over-fatigued last night, that was all.

"I can't imagine what made you get up so preposterously early this morning, child," said Mrs. Chevenix rather impatiently, "instead of trying to recruit your strength, as any sensible young woman would have done. How can you expect your complexion to last, if you go on in this way? You are as dark under the eyes as if you had not slept an hour for the last fortnight. Good looks are very well in their way, Elizabeth; but they won't stand such treatment as this. Go up to your room and lie down for an hour or two, and let Mason give you one of my globules."

Elizabeth shrugged her shoulders impatiently; globules for the cure of her disease! Infinitesimal doses for the healing of that great agony! How foolish a thing this second childishness of comfortable emotionless middle age is; this fools' paradise of pet poodles and homœopathy; this empty senile existence, which remains for some men and women, when feeling and passion are dead and gone!

"You know I don't believe in homœopathic medicine," she said, turning her tired head aside upon the pillow of the sofa where they had laid her, with a look of utter weariness and disgust; "or in any other medicines indeed. I was never ill in my life, that I can remember, and I am not ill now. Let me lie here; I feel as if I could never get up again as long as I live."

"A natural consequence of over-excitement," said Mrs. Chevenix. "Shut the folding-doors, Mason, in case any one should call; and bring Miss Luttrell the *couvre-pied* from the sofa in my bedroom. You shall have a mutton-chop and a pint of Moselle for your luncheon, Lizzie; and if Lord Paulyn should come before luncheon, I shan't allow him to see you."

"Lord Paulyn!" cried the girl, with a shiver, "let me never hear his name again as long as I live. He has broken my heart."

Mrs. Chevenix received this wild assertion with the stony stare of bewilderment.

"My dearest Lizzie, what are you dreaming of?" she exclaimed; pleased to think that Mason had departed, in quest of the *couvre-pied*, before this strange utterance. "I am sure that poor young man is perfectly devoted to you."

"Who wants his devotion?" cried Elizabeth impatiently.

"Has he ever been anything but a torment to me? O, yes, I know what you are going to say," she exclaimed, interrupting aunt Chevenix's half-uttered exclamation. "In that case, why did I encourage his attentions? If I did so, I hardly knew that I was encouraging them. It was rather pleasant to feel that other people thought a great deal more of me on account of his silly infatuation; and he is not the kind of man who would ever be much the worse for any disappointment in that way. It would be too preposterous to suppose that he has a heart capable of feeling deeply about anything except his racehorses."

This was said half listlessly, yet with an air which implied that the speaker was trying to justify herself, and was half doubtful of the force of her own reasoning.

"No heart!" ejaculated Mrs. Chevenix indignantly; "why, I do believe that young man is all heart. I'm sure the warmth of his attachment to you is a very strong proof of it. No heart, indeed. If you had spoken of your tall curate now, with his rigid puritanical expression of countenance (just the look of an icono—what's his name—a man who would chop the noses off the saints on the carved doors of a cathedral—I should think), if you had talked of his having no heart, I might have agreed with you."

"Aunt Chevenix," said Elizabeth, starting up from her pillow, "if you ever dare to say one word in disparagement of Malcolm Forde, I shall hate you. I am almost tempted to hate you as it is, for being at the root of all my misery. Don't put your finger upon an open wound. You have no occasion to run him down now; he is nothing more to me. He came here this morning, not an hour ago, to give me up. I meant to tell you nothing about this; but you would have found it out somehow, I daresay, before long, and it is just as well you should know at once. He came to give me up, of his own accord. Our dream of happiness was very short, was it not? and he has ended it of his own free will. It would hardly have seemed so strange if I had been tempted away from him; for, so far as the offer of a brilliant position in this world can tempt a penniless parson's daughter, I have been tempted. Yet Heaven knows my faith never wavered for a moment. But he had heard something about Lord Pauly and me; had seen some silly paragraph in a newspaper, and came to give me up. Even if I had been inclined to exculpate myself, he gave me no opportunity; he would hardly let me speak. And it was not for me to supplicate for a hearing; so I let him go, without an effort to detain him, almost as coldly as he renounced me."

"And you acted like a woman of spirit in so doing," cried Mrs. Chevenix triumphantly; indeed, nothing could be more delightful to her than this intelligence. "Sue to him, indeed—exculpate yourself to him!—that would be rather too much. I congratulate

late you, my dear girl, upon having released yourself from a most unfortunate and mistaken engagement."

"It may have been all that," said the girl, shrinking from her aunt's soothing caress with a shiver; "but, unluckily, I loved the man. 'I loved you once,'" she repeated dreamily, going back to her interview with Malcolm Forde. "O God, that I should live to hear him say that! 'I loved you once.'"

"My dearest child, it was not in human nature that such an engagement as that could endure. You, handsome, accomplished, admired, with peculiar opportunities of social success;" this with a swelling pride in that dainty little establishment in Eaton-place-south, and in herself as the sole source of these opportunities. "He, an obscure provincial curate; a man who, entering the Church somewhat late in life, has actually started at a disadvantage; not even a particularly agreeable or good-looking person; and I feel sure that when reason and experience have come to your aid, Lizzie, you will confess the baselessness of your infatuation."

"When experience has made me a hard, worldly old woman, like Lady Paulyn, I may begin to see things in that light," said Elizabeth, bitterly; "but please don't talk to me any more about Mr. Forde. Respect his name as you would if he were dead. As if he were dead," she repeated. "Could I be any more unhappy if he were lying in his grave?"

"Do not be afraid that I shall talk of the man," exclaimed Mrs. Chevenix indignantly. "I am too much disgusted with his conduct. To choose the very time in which his prospects began to improve—as I conclude this uncle has left him something—to throw you off! However, I thank Providence that your future may be fifty times more brilliant than any position which he could offer you at his best!"

Elizabeth said nothing; but sat with fixed eyes staring at empty space. Could it be that he was indeed dead to her; that he would not come back? O, surely not. That parting could not be final. It was not possible that he could pluck her from his heart so easily; she, who on her side felt as if she were verily a part of himself, a mere subordinate being that could have no existence without him. She felt all this in spite of her season of independent pleasure; in spite of these last few months in which he had had no share in her life. Her lower instincts had been gratified by those vanities and dissipations; the nobler half of her being belonged to him, and held itself apart from all the world besides.

"He will come back to me," she said to herself. "If I had not thought that, I could never have let him go. I should have grovelled at his feet, thrown myself between him and the door, clung to him as a shipwrecked sailor clings to a floating spar, rather than let him leave me for ever."

Buoyed up by this belief, Elizabeth supported her existence with a tolerable show of calm; was even able to go to a dinner-party that evening—a dinner in Montague-square—at which there was no fear of meeting Lord Paulyn; looked very lovely, in spite of her pallor, if not her best; sang, and talked, and laughed, with that low melodious laugh which was one of her fascinations; and altogether delighted Mrs. Chevenix, who had expected to see her niece stricken down utterly for a day or two,

“He will come back to me,” the girl was saying to herself all the evening. “There will be a letter, perhaps, waiting for me when we go home.”

All that day she had been expecting his return, or at the least some tender remorseful letter; but the day had passed and he had made no sign. Then she told herself that his anger could hardly cool all at once; he had been very angry, no doubt, though he had borne himself like a rock. Not all at once could he discover how essential she was to his life.

How eager she was for the return to Eaton-place! how more than usually wearisome seemed that endless small talk about flower-shows and picture galleries, and opera singers and classical music! She fancied how the letter would be handed to her by her aunt’s serving-man; the dear letter with its superscription in that noble hand. How she would snatch it from the salver, and run up to her own room to devour its contents in happy solitude! She could almost fancy how it would begin:

“My dearest,—Forgive me!”

They were at home at last; but the serving-man, who looked sleepy, brought her no salver.

“Any letters, Plomber?” she asked, with well-assumed carelessness.

“No, ma’am.”

“Did you expect anything particular?” Mrs. Chevenix inquired.

“No; only I thought there might have been one from—from Gerty or Di.”

“What can people at Hawleigh have to write about?” said her aunt contemptuously.

The girl went straight to her room, heart-sick.

“He will come back to me to-morrow,” she said.

To-morrow came, but brought no tidings of Malcolm Forde—a dreary day, the longest Elizabeth ever remembered in her life—which had contained many days that were dull enough and blank enough in all conscience.

Lord Paulyn came, as he had come on the previous afternoon; but he was not allowed to see Miss Luttrell. She was ill, Mrs. Chevenix told him, really prostrate; such a sensitive nature, dear Lord Paulyn, so much imagination. The excitement of that

play was too much for her. I'm afraid I must take her down to Brighton for change of air."

The Viscount departed unwillingly, displeased at this interruption of his smaller pleasures, the trifling talk and tea-drinking, in the hour he had been wont of old to devote to more masculine diversions—horsey talk at a horsey club, or a lounge at Tattersall's.

But although he was thus banished by the diplomatic matron, Elizabeth was not really ill. She was only white and wan, with blank tearless eyes, the living image of despair. Not in a condition to be seen by a young nobleman who aspired to decorate her brow with a coronet. A lifeless creature, whose tenure of happiness hung on a thread. Would he come or write? Would he forgive her, and take her back to his heart?

"Why did I ever come to London?" she asked herself, with a curious wonder at her own folly.

The cup of pleasure, being drained to the dregs, had left an after flavour of exceeding bitterness. She looked back to those sweet peaceful days at Hawleigh, to that spring-time of life and love, when her heart had been exultant with a girl's triumph in her first important conquest, and remembered how averse Malcolm Forde had been to the idea of this visit. And for such empty trifles, for the vapid pleasures of a London season, a few balls, a few picnics—at best only the old Hawleigh dances and picnics upon a larger scale—she had jeopardised that dearest treasure; for so childish a vanity as seeing this unknown world of good society, she had imperilled and lost the confidence of her lover!

Other to-morrows came and faded, and still there was no sign of relenting on the part of Malcolm Forde. And still the girl's white face and absent manner forbade the admission of visitors. Lord Paulyn was impatient, sullen even, with a sense of injury, as if he had been an accepted lover unduly kept at bay. Upon one particular afternoon, feeling his disappointment acutely—he had brought a fresh bouquet of stephanotis and maiden-hair every afternoon, waxen blossoms which had bloomed and languished unheeded by Elizabeth's dull eyes—he gave free utterance to his vexation, and in a communicative mood poured his griefs into the maternal bosom of Mrs. Chevenix. It was uncommonly hard, he urged, that after all he had put up with and gone through—the amount of nonsense he had stood from Miss Luttrell—she should throw him over the bridge for a paragon fellow like that man at Hawleigh.

"My dear Lord Paulyn," replied Mrs. Chevenix, with a confidential air, bending her head a little nearer to the young man, as he sat *à cheval* on his favourite *pouff*, and by that gracious movement besprinkling him lightly with *poudre de Maréchal*,

"that engagement is one which I have a secret conviction cannot be enduring. If I had not entertained such an opinion, I should never have encouraged—I will go farther, and say I would never have sanctioned—your frequent presence in this house. No," this with a lofty air, as of sublimest virtue, "I have too much regard for what is due to myself, as well as to you. I am no slave of rank or wealth. If I did not think that you were eminently suited to my niece, and Mr. Forde as eminently unsuited to her, I should not have lent my support to an intimacy which could have but one result. Elizabeth is a girl whom to know is to love."

"I'm not sure about that," said the young man, not deeply moved by this solemn address. "She's rather a queer girl, take her altogether; fools a man to the top of his bent one day, and snubs him the next; gives herself no end of airs, as if the world and everybody in it had been made to order for her. But she's the handsomest woman in London, and she has a peculiar way of her own that no man could stand against. I hadn't known her a fortnight before I made up my mind I'd marry her. But I didn't go to work rashly for all that; I left Hawleigh without committing myself; gave myself time to find out if it was a serious case with me."

Mrs. Chevenix gave a little impatient sigh.

"If you had been a shade less cautious, and had spoken out at once, you might have prevented this foolish affair with Mr. Forde," she said.

"Yes, but I pride myself upon knowing what I'm about—not putting my horse at a fence unless I know what's on the other side of it. And the worst of this Forde business is, that she's desperately fond of him, has owned as much to me, and gloried in owning it."

"A girl's delusion," said Mrs. Chevenix soothingly; "the romance of an hour, which will vanish like a summer cloud when the charm of novelty is gone. She has some foolish exalted idea of Mr. Forde's character, a half-religious hallucination that is not likely to last long."

"I hope not," replied the Viscount in his matter-of-fact way. "At any rate, I mean to stand my ground; only it's rather wearing for a man's temper. I wanted the whole business settled and done with by the end of the season. I've all manner of engagements for my yachts and stable. I must be at Goodwood at the end of this month, and I've a sailing-match at Havre the first week in August; then come German steeplechases. I've wasted more time than I ever wasted in my life before upon this affair."

"Be assured of my entire sympathy," murmured Mrs. Chevenix.

"Yes, of course, I know you are all there," answered the

hapless lover, carelessly. "I've known all along you'd be on my side. It isn't likely you'd back that plater,"—by which contemptuous epithet he described his rival. "But I should like to see the wind-up of this engagement, or," almost savagely, "I should like to get Elizabeth Luttrell out of my head, and be my own man again."

Mrs. Chevenix shuddered. This hint of a sudden wrench, a violent effort to emancipate himself, on the part of the Viscount, filled her soul with consternation.

"I'm doing very wrong," she exclaimed, with a sudden gush of friendship. "It is a breach of confidence for which I shall hardly be able to forgive myself, but I can't bear to see you suffer, and to withhold knowledge that might be consolatory. I have reason to believe that the engagement between my niece and Mr. Forde is at an end."

"What!" cried Reginald Paulyn; "she has thrown him off. She has served him as she serves everybody else, blown hot one day and cold the next."

"I have reason to believe that they have quarrelled," Mrs. Chevenix said mysteriously.

"What, has she seen him lately?"

"She has; and since I have gone so far,—on the impulse of the moment, prompted only by my sympathy with your depth of feeling,—I must still go farther. The quarrel was about you. Mr. Forde had seen some paragraph associating your names—a marriage in high life—something absurd of that kind."

"Yes, I know; Cinqmars showed me the newspaper. It was his doing, I fancy. Mrs. Cinqmars has taken me under her wing, and no doubt inspired the paragraph, with the notion that it might bring matters to a crisis."

"It has produced a crisis," said Mrs. Chevenix, solemnly, "and a very painful one for Elizabeth. The poor girl is utterly crushed."

"She was so fond of that beggar," muttered Lord Paulyn, gloomily.

"Perhaps not so much on that account as for the humiliation involved in such an idea. To be accused of having played fast and loose, of having encouraged your attentions while she was engaged to him. And now, between you both, she finds herself abandoned, standing alone in the world, perhaps the mark for slander."

"Abandoned! standing alone!" cried Lord Paulyn, starting up from his low chair as if he would have rushed off at once in quest of a marriage license. "Why, she must know that I am ready to marry her to-morrow!"

This was just the point at which Mrs. Chevenix could afford to leave him.

“My dear young friend,” she exclaimed, “moderate your feelings, I entreat. She is not a girl to be taken by storm. Let her recover from the shock she has received; then, while her heart is still sore, wounded, weary with a sense of its own emptiness, then urge your suit once more, and I have little doubt that you will conquer; that the contrast between your generous all-confiding affection and Mr. Forde’s jealous tyranny will awaken the purest and truest emotions of her heart.”

This was a more exalted style of language than Reginald Paulyn cared about—a kind of thing which, in his own simple and forcible vocabulary, he denominated “humbug”—but the main fact was pleasing to him. Elizabeth had dismissed, or had been deserted by, her plighted lover. The ground was cleared for himself.

CHAPTER VIII.

“She weeps alone for pleasures not to be;
Sorely she wept until the night came on,
And then, instead of love, O misery!
She brooded o’er the luxury alone:
His image in the dusk she seem’d to see,
And to the silence made a gentle moan,
Spreading her perfect arms upon the air,
And on her couch low murmuring, ‘Where? O where!’”

No flicker of colour brightened the pallid cheeks, no ray of their accustomed light shone in the dull eyes, and yet Elizabeth was not ill. She was only intensely miserable.

“I only wish I were ill,” she said, impatiently, when her aunt urged the necessity of medical advice, change of air—some speedy means by which blanched cheeks and heavy eyes might be cured. “For in that case there might be some hope that I should die. But I am not ill; I don’t believe my pulse beats half-a-dozen times more in a minute since Malcolm Forde renounced me. I eat and drink, and sleep even, more or less. There are a good many hours in every night in which I lie awake staring at the wall; but before the maid comes to get my bath ready, I do manage to sleep, somehow. And I dream that Malcolm and I are happy, walking on the common just beyond our house at Hawleigh. I never dream of our quarrel; only that I am with him, and utterly happy. I think the pain of waking from one of those lying dreams, and finding that it is only a dream, is sharper agony than the worst vision of his unkindness with which sleep could torture me. To dream that he is all my own, to feel his hand locked in mine, and to wake and remember that I have lost him—yes, that is misery.”

Whereupon Mrs. Chevenix would dilate upon the childishness of such regrets, and would set forth the numerous deprivations which her niece would have had to endure as Mr. Forde's wife; how she could never have kept her carriage, or at best only a pony-chaise or one-horse wagonette, the hollowest mockery or phantasm of a carriage, infinitely worse than none, as implying the desire for an equipage without the ability to maintain one—a thing that would be spoken of timorously as a "conveyance;" how, as a clergyman's wife, she could not hope to be on a level with the county families; how all her natural aspirations for "style" and "society" would be nipped in the bud; while such means as her husband could command would be devoted to the relief of tiresome old women, and the maintenance of an expensive choir. From this dreary picture Mrs. Chevenix branched off to Lord Paulyn, his generosity, his self-abnegation, his chivalry, his thousand virtues, and his three country seats.

"If I could be talked into marrying a man I don't care a straw about, while I love another with all my heart and soul, your eloquence might ultimately unite me to Lord Paulyn," Elizabeth said, with a sneer; "but I am not quite weak enough for that. I daresay it sounds very ungrateful, after all the money you have spent upon me, and all the trouble you have taken about me; but O, aunt Chevenix, how I wish I had never come to London! The beginning of my visit to you was the beginning of my quarrel with Malcolm. How could I slight a wish of his! I loved him hopelessly for a long year before I won him, and I only kept his love a few short weeks. Was there ever such folly since the world began?"

Mrs. Chevenix urged Brighton as the universal healer of cockney griefs. What Londoner does not believe in the curative powers of Brighton for all ailments of the mind and body? The pleasant treadmill tramp up and down the King's-road, interchanging affectionate greetings with people you met yesterday in Bond-street; the agreeable monotony of the pier; the pervading flavour of London which mingles with the salt breath of the sea. Mrs. Chevenix declared that in that cheerful atmosphere Elizabeth would forget her griefs.

"It is not the season for Brighton, I admit," she confessed, reluctantly, "but there are always plenty of nice people there in the Goodwood week; or we might even stay at Chichester, if you preferred it."

"You are very good to trouble yourself so much about me," said Elizabeth, trying to be grateful, yet with an air of extreme weariness; "but I assure you there is nothing the matter—nothing but a sorrow that must wear itself out somehow—as all sorrows do, I suppose, when people are young and strong as I am, and

not of the stuff that grief can destroy. The best place for me is home. I shall not give any one trouble there. I can just live my own life; visit the poor, perhaps, a little again," with a faint choking sob; "or teach in the Sunday school; and no one will take any notice of me. I am not at all fit for society. I don't hear what people are saying, and I am always in danger of answering at random; and I don't want people to talk about the worm in the bud, or to sit like Patience on a monument, and all that kind of thing. Let me take my sorrow home to Hawleigh, auntie, and dig a decent grave for it there."

"Go back to Hawleigh! Yes; to meet that man again, I suppose, and begin over again."

"No fear of that. I had a letter from Gertrude this morning; I'll read you what she says about him, if you like."

She took out a closely-written letter; that wondrous composition, a lady's letter, utterly devoid of intelligence likely to interest the human mind, yet crossed and bracketed and interpolated, as if brimming over with matter.

"We have all been surprised by Mr. Forde's sudden desertion of Hawleigh, and can only imagine that things are ended between you and him; and that you have returned to your old idea about Lord Paulyn. I know auntie had set her heart upon that match, and I never thought your engagement to Mr. Forde would survive your visit to Eaton-place."

"Other people could see my peril," said Elizabeth bitterly, as she folded the letter. "It was only I who was blind."

"Other people are blessed with common sense, and would naturally foresee the termination of so ill-advised an engagement," Mrs. Chevenix replied sharply. She was fast losing patience with this favourite niece of hers, who had fortune at her feet, and spurned it. "The day will come when you will repent this folly," she said, "at a time when it may be too late to retrace your steps. Even Lord Paulyn's infatuation will not last for ever; you have trifled with him too long already."

"Trifled with him!" echoed Elizabeth scornfully; "I have only one wish about him,—that I may never see his face again."

Mrs. Cinqmars called in Eaton-place a day or two after the private theatricals, and was full of anxiety about her sweet Elizabeth; entreating to be allowed to see her, if only for a few minutes. But this privilege Miss Luttrell refused obstinately.

"I detest the whole set, and will never see any of them again," she said fretfully, when her aunt brought her that lady's message. Nor did Mrs. Chevenix press the point; she did not care to expose her niece's faded countenance to the sharp eyes of

Mrs. Cinquars. She did not want the Rancho world to know that Elizabeth had been deserted by her lover, and had taken that desertion so deeply to heart.

After about a week of anxiety, during which she had hoped every day to see the girl's dull face brighten, and her spirits revive with the natural elasticity of youth, Mrs. Chevenix lost heart; and hearing of some particular friends who were just returning to Torquay, she consented to Elizabeth's return under their wing. They would take her to Exeter, where her father could meet her on the arrival of the down train; so that the proprieties should be in no manner outraged by her journey. The girl seemed so utterly broken down, that it was hopeless to expect her speedy revival. All Mrs. Chevenix's ambitious dreams must be held in suspense till next year; unless destiny interposed in some beneficent manner during the hunting season, when Lord Paulyn might reappear at the Vicarage, and find this wretched girl cured of her folly.

So Elizabeth had her wish, and went home; went home to bury her misery in the dull quiet of the old life, glad to be released from that brighter world which had now become odious to her. It is possible that some lurking hope, some expectation she would scarcely confess to herself, was at the root of her eager desire for that homeward journey.

She went over that brief sentence in Gertrude's letter again and again; "they had been surprised by Mr. Forde's sudden desertion of Hawleigh." What did that mean? Had he returned to his duties and announced the approaching termination of them? or was the "desertion" of which her sister wrote an accomplished fact? Had he bidden them farewell, and departed to some new field of usefulness? Had he shifted the scene of that laborious career which Mother Church reserves for her children?

"I shall be enlightened to-night," she said to herself, as she bade her aunt good-bye at Paddington, in the brilliant summer noontide. The departure platform was crowded with holiday travellers, people who appeared to be serene in a fixed belief that this life was intended for the pursuit of frivolous pleasures.

She sat in the corner of the railway-carriage, with half-closed eyes, during the greater part of the journey, pretending to be asleep, as a means of escaping the benevolent officiousness of her aunt's particular friends; but she was conscious of every feature in the landscape that flashed past the window, and the journey seemed of an almost intolerable length to her weary spirit. Her father's mild face peering in at the window, when the train entered Exeter's stately terminus, struck her with an emotion that was almost pain. She had thought of him so little during the last few months; had lived her own life—a life of pleasure and vanity—with so supreme a selfishness. She

clung to him for a moment, as he kissed her, with a remorseful tenderness.

"Why, Lizzie, my dear, how ill you look!" he said, startled by the settled pallor of the face, that looked at him with such a new tenderness; "Maria told me nothing in her last letter."

"There was nothing to tell, papa," said Elizabeth; "I am not ill, only very tired."

"That foolish theatrical performance, I'm afraid, my love; or—or——" looking at her anxiously, "you may have been unhappy about something—some misunderstanding. I have seen Forde."

They were alone together in a deserted waiting-room; the South Devon train having whisked Mrs. Chevenix's particular friends off to Torquay.

"Then you know all, papa," with a feeble attempt to appear supremely indifferent; "that he and I did not suit each other, and have agreed to differ, as some one says somewhere."

"Something to that effect, my dear. But Forde fully exonerated you. He took all the blame upon himself."

"Very generous," with her old scornful laugh; "but the usual thing in such cases, I believe. Are you very angry with me for coming back to you in this forlorn condition?"

"Angry with you, my love! How can you imagine such a thing! Forde is an excellent fellow, but could never have been a good match for you. I am not the kind of man to interfere with my children's wishes; but your aunt had inspired me with more ambitious ideas about you, and I confess I was disappointed."

"Then you may be quite happy, papa; Mr. Forde and I have parted for ever."

"He turn'd him right and round about,
Upon the Irish shore;
And gae his bridle-reins a shake,
With adieu for ever more, my dear,
With adieu for ever more!"

CHAPTER IX.

"Can we, whose souls are lighted
With wisdom from on high,
Can we to men benighted
The lamp of life deny?
Salvation! O salvation!
The joyful sound proclaim,
Till each remotest nation
Has learnt Messiah's name."

It was a dismal coming home after all the glories of that London season. There was a suppressed triumph in Gertrude's

manner, which Elizabeth felt, but could hardly take objection to. Diana was indifferent, shrugged her shoulders, and observed that Mrs. Chevenix's London seasons were not astounding in their results. "We are like Somebody and his men," she said; "we all ride up the hill, and then ride down again." The beauty of the family had not endeared herself infinitely to these elder sisters. Blanche clung about her tenderly, and sighed, and mutely sympathised, not daring to speak of her sister's woes; but evidently brimming over with compassion. The carresses and unspoken compassion were a great deal more tiresome to Elizabeth than the spiteful exultation of the elders.

"I almost wish I had come back engaged to Lord Paulyn," she said to herself. "It would be better to marry a man one despised than to put up with this kind of thing."

Mr. Forde's name was evidently tabooed in the domestic circle, as a delicate attention to herself; but she had made her father tell her all he knew about her lost lover during the journey from Exeter.

"Yes, my dear, he is going to put his old idea into execution; he is going to the South-Sea Islands as a missionary. It is a kind of craze of his, poor fellow; and upon my word, Lizzie, I think you are happily released from your engagement to a man with such a notion. Rely upon it, the old idea would have got the better of him sooner or later, however comfortably settled he might have been in England; and he would have wanted to drag you off to some savage country with him."

"Very likely," said Elizabeth, with a little sigh.

She was thinking what happiness it would have seemed to her to have gone with him; to have shared his perils, to have lightened his labours, to have been verily the other half of his mind and soul. What matter how desolate the region so long as they two had been together; to have watched his slumbers in those long silent nights, with no sound save the distant cry of some beast of prey; to have died even, clasped to his breast, beneath a rain of poisoned arrows; or done to death by a savage's stone hatchet!

"When does he go?" she asked presently.

"Immediately. He has bidden us all good-bye. He preaches his farewell sermon in St. Clement's to-morrow evening."

"Her heart gave a wild leap at this. She would hear his voice once more. He would see her sitting in her accustomed corner in the old square pew below the pulpit—could not help seeing her all through his sermon; who could tell if the sight of her face might not melt him?"

"But his heart is made of stone," she thought, "or it would have softened towards me before this. He has only a heart for the heathen; not for common human sorrows, not for the mute agonies of a love like mine."

"I suppose if I had any proper pride, I should not go to hear him preach to-morrow night," she said to herself; "but I think my stock of pride was exhausted the day he came to me in Eaton-place. If that interview were to come over again I would grovel in the dust at his feet. What is there that I would not do to win him back?"

Home hardly seemed such a peaceful shelter as she had fancied it when she turned with disgust from the frivolities of Eaton-place. It would have been very well without her sisters; but she had an uncomfortable consciousness that six watchful eyes were upon her, and that three active minds were occupied in the consideration of her affairs. She had not even the comfort of solitude in the night season, for her tower was shared by Blanche, and she could not sigh or sob in her sleep without arousing that sympathetic young person, who was unhappily a light sleeper. She heard soothing murmurs of "poor Lizzie," "poor darling," amidst her fittful slumber; and turned angrily upon her pillow, with her face to the wall, like king David in the day of his sorrow.

She looked desperately ill next morning when the July sun shone into the tower chamber, and the skylark sent up his orisons from his wicker cage outside the arched casement. The excitement of her return, vague hopes that lightened her despair, had brightened her face with a faint semblance of the old brightness yesterday evening; but to-day Blanche beheld the wreck that one season's joys and sorrows had made of her sister.

"I'll bring you your breakfast, darling," she said, in her caressing way. "Of course you won't think of going to church to-day."

"Did you ever know me stop away from church on a Sunday morning?" Elizabeth answered impatiently; "that is one of the penalties of our position."

"But if you are really ill, darling."

"I am not really ill; there is nothing the matter with me. You needn't stare at me in that disconsolate way. I can't help it if I am pale: a London season is not calculated to improve one's complexion. You can send me up a cup of tea presently, if you like; I always had an early cup of tea in London. And if you'll be kind enough to go on dressing and take no notice of me, I may be able to get half-an-hour's sleep."

That half-hour's sleep seemed to have done a good deal for Elizabeth; for when she came downstairs, after a cold bath and a careful toilette, when the bells began to ring gaily out from the ponderous square tower of St. Clement's, she was looking something like her old self. She had put on her prettiest bonnet, and had dressed herself in white; the dress Malcolm had always praised. If the charm of a bonnet or a dress could only touch

his heart, and keep him from cocoa-nut groves, and savage women in scanty raiment, and other horrors!

What a strange thing it seemed to hear his voice once more in the gray old church!—to hear it and to know that this day was the last upon which she could ever hope to hear it; for beyond that dismal mission who would dare to look? She tried to realise the fact of his speedy departure, but it was difficult. His presence in the old familiar church was such a natural thing—a fact that had been going on all her life, it seemed to her; for she could hardly bring herself to look behind those days, to the blank era of curates who counted for nothing in her existence. And the church would be there still, a dreary immutability; the voice of a stranger echoing along the same aisle, and she compelled to sit and listen: while her miserable lonely soul tried to follow that beloved wanderer across unknown seas, to a land that was more strange than a fairy tale.

His presence there to-day, considered in the light of that near future, had a phantasmal aspect, as if the spirit of the newly-dead had been with them for a brief space, looking at them with kind and mournful eyes. Was he not like the very dead; called away to a land distant and inaccessible as the regions of death? Was there any stronger hope of seeing him again than if he had indeed been numbered with the dead?

He, too, had changed since that day in Eaton-place. He was paler than usual, and his eyes had a haggard look, as with prolonged sleeplessness. But Elizabeth dared not appropriate to herself these signs of deep feeling. Was there not enough in his parting with these people, in the thoughts of the new life that lay before him, to move him strangely?

Not once throughout that morning service did their eyes meet. He read the prayers and lessons in his grave firm voice, with no sign of faltering, every tone strong and penetrating as of old, no fragments of sentences going astray among the echoes, every word clear, resonant as a deep-toned bell.

The interval between the two services was a dreary blank for Elizabeth. The monotonous machinery of home, which had been so wearisome before her departure, seemed still more wearisome now. She shuddered at the thought that her life was to go on for ever and ever like this; every Sunday an exact repetition of other Sundays. The mid-day luncheon, enlivened by an occasional dropper-in; the afternoon dawdled away somehow; the evening service, in the mournful summer dusk; the all-pervading sense that life was an objectless business. How was she to endure these things until the end of her days?

Evening came at last: the bells ringing with a softer sound in the balmy air. The old church was more crowded than Elizabeth ever remembered to have ~~was~~ it before, crowded with

people who very seldom came to church, crowded with those for whom Mr. Forde had worked with an unflinching zeal—the very poor.

Mr. Luttrell read prayers, prayers which Elizabeth heard unconscious of their meaning; while Gertrude prayed and responded in her usual business-like way, with the air of an ancient mother assisting at the sacrifice of her son. Very long those prayers seemed to Elizabeth, but they came to an end at last, and in the deepening dusk Mr. Forde went slowly up to the pulpit.

Then, as he adjusted the newly-lighted wax-candles on each side of him, needing the light very little for his own convenience, since his sermons were chiefly extempore, he looked thoughtfully downwards, and, Elizabeth looking up from her corner in the old pew, their eyes met for the first time; his so grave and spiritual in their expression, with a far-away look, as of a man whose thoughts dwell in worlds remote from this common earth; hers yearning, imploring, despairing.

Brief was the moment of those looks meeting. He unrolled his little black-covered volume of notes, and began the last sermon he was ever to preach in Hawleigh.

Wanting the fire of the speaker's voice and manner, the depth of pathos in some passages, the passion of faith in others, a barren transcript of that farewell address might seem commonplace enough. The things he had to say to them were things that have been said very often before at such partings; it was only the man who was exceptional: exceptional in his earnestness, exceptional in a certain grandeur of face and manner, which, to that regretful assembly, made him God-like. He told them simply, but with a fervour in those simple phrases, a warmth in those subdued tones, how he had laboured for them and loved them; with what happy results, with a love that had been returned to him sevenfold, with experiences that had been unutterably sweet to him. He told them how he dared to believe that much of his labour among them would be permanent; that it was work which, done once, was done for ever; that the seed would remain and yield a plenteous harvest, when he the sower was far away, labouring to redeem waste lands where no seed had ever been scattered, where no sheaves had ever been gathered for the Master's barns. Then, with a sudden change from mournful tenderness to supreme enthusiasm, he told them what he was going to do. How this mission service was the realisation of a hope and a dream that had been with him more or less from the beginning, that had swelled his heart long ago, when he was a boy at his mother's knee, hearing from her dear lips sad stories of that far-away world where the light of revelation had never cloven the thick darkness, where man lived and died without God.

Of possible dangers to be encountered he spoke not at all. He showed them only the brighter side of a missionary's career; the grandeur of his privileges as a bearer of glad tidings, the vast hopes that he carried with him as the regenerator of a people lost to their God, as the very agent and lieutenant of Christ himself. He dwelt with a picturesque fancy on the natural splendour of that remote world amidst the southern sea. He spoke of those groves where the breadfruit-tree spreads its stalwart branches wide as those of patriarchal oak or elm in pleasant England; where the leafy woods in nature's calm decay are glorious with an ever-changing splendour of hue unknown in colder climes; where here and there in quiet valleys men and women live in an almost Arcadian simplicity; yet in their utter ignorance of good and evil have no such words in their vocabulary as honour, truth, or virtue; while in other isles, perchance as fair to look upon, vice and crime walk rampant, and superstition too dark for words to paint holds mankind in its unholy thrall. He told them how those islands to which he was going, discovered nearly three hundred years ago by a Spanish navigator, had been suffered to languish in outer darkness until now, and how it was his hope and prayer to be their earliest evangelist. He told them briefly of the far greater men who had gone before him, of the saints of old time, who had undertaken such missions in ages when their peril was tenfold, and then lightly touched upon the history of later missions, from the sailing of the *Duff* downwards.

At the close of that farewell address, there was scarcely one among his hearers, except the miserable girl who loved him with a too earthly love, whose heart was not warmed with some touch of his own heroic passion, and who would not have felt ashamed of a selfish desire to detain him. He seemed created to fulfil the mission he had chosen for himself; God's fitting instrument for the noblest work that was ever given unto man to do.


Upon Elizabeth's ear the solemn close of that leavetaking sounded like a funeral knell. Would she ever hear his voice again—ever, in all the dreary days to come, feel her heart stirred by those deep-toned accents—ever again look upward to that earnest face, which to-night had a grandeur that was not of the earth, earthy?

Now, perhaps for the first time, she utterly despaired of his relenting—of his turning back to take her to his heart again. He did not need her or her human love. He had so wide a life without her, and beyond her—a life which she could never have shared, since she lacked all the gifts that were needed to open the door of that divine city where he dwelt in an atmosphere of light supernal. Could her feeble aspirations towards things celestial,

her wavering faith, have ever enabled her to tread the path he trod? Alas, no! To-night she felt how vast was the distance that divided them; and that, if he had suffered her to attach herself to his career, she would have been nothing but a clog and a hindrance for him. And she felt with exceeding bitterness how easy it was for him to renounce her—for him, whose soul was lifted to the very gates of heaven by those splendid dreams with which she had no sympathy. She thought with miserable self-scorn of her fancy that he would have found his life unendurable without her; that she must needs be as necessary to his existence as he was to hers. Poor deluded fool! she had taken no account of his one supreme ambition when she made that calculation; she had thought of him only as a weak creature like herself, the slave of an earthly passion.

Throughout that eloquent sermon she had hardly taken her eyes from his face; but not often had his glance shot downwards to the dusky corner where she sat, a white still figure, phantom-like in the uncertain light. His gaze, for the most part, was directed far beyond her, to the mass of shabbily-dressed listeners who crowded the other end of the church, his peculiar flock, those English heathens he had found in the lanes and byways of Hawleigh and its neighbouring villages, some of whom had walked half-a-dozen miles to hear his farewell.

There had been a good deal of quiet crying among the women, but no dramatic or oratorical display of emotion on the part of the preacher. Yet every one felt that he was deeply moved; that it was not without profound sorrow he bade them such a long good-bye. There was a solemn hush as he came down from the pulpit, and for some breathless moments the people stood motionless, looking after him. Then came a favourite hymn, "From Greenland's Icy Mountains," a hymn which the congregation sang with faltering voice; tremulous sopranos among the young-ladyhood of Hawleigh testifying to the esteem in which the Curate had been held. No sound of Elizabeth's voice mingled with that psalmody; Gertrude sang in a high soprano, with a tremolo which she affected at all times, and the air of a martyr making melody as she marched towards the stake; and it seemed as if that shrill peal drew Mr. Forde's attention to the Vicar's pew. He looked that way, and saw Elizabeth standing like a statue, with a face as white as her gown.



CHAPTER X.

“ O last love ! O first love !
 My love with the true, true heart !
 To think I have come to this your home,
 And yet we are apart.”

A SLEEPLESS night; a night of tossing to and fro, and mental fever, and doubt, and uncertainty, half-formed resolves, a long struggle between love and pride; and the early summer light shines on a pale eager face and tired eyes that have been watching for the dawn.

When that laggard morning comes, Elizabeth Luttrell has made up her mind to do something very desperate, very mad, perhaps; she does not shrink from confessing as much to herself; but something without doing which she feels she cannot endure her life.

She will see him once more, face to face; hear his voice speaking to her, and her only, once more in their lives; touch his hand, perchance, in friendly farewell, and then resign herself to their inevitable parting.

Of the reversal of that decree, or that any influence she can bring to bear can make him waver in his purpose, she cherishes no hope. There was that in his speech and manner last night which spoke of a resolve no earthly forces could shake. What could her selfish passion, her narrow love, do against a purpose so high, a scheme that involved the eternal welfare of millions? For who shall assign the natural limits of the missionary's work, or gauge the width of that new world over which his influence shall extend?

No; she deluded herself with no hope that he might be turned aside even at the last moment, by the witchery of her smiles, by the pathos of her tears. She knew now that his world was not her world; that wide as the east is from the west were his thoughts from her thoughts. She hoped nothing, except that he would hear her patiently when she sought to exonerate herself from the charge of inconstancy, or any flagrant wrong against him; hear her while she told him the true history of her acquaintance with Lord Paulyn; hear and believe her, and carry away with him at least the memory of a woman who had loved him dearly, and had never wronged him by so much as a thought.

And then they would shake hands calmly, and he would give her his blessing, the blessing of a possible saint and martyr; and so he would fade for ever from her bodily eyes, leaving only that image of him which she must carry in her heart to the grave.

"I have no pride where he is concerned," she thought, as she paused to consider how vast an outrage against the conventionalities she was about to perpetrate.

The up-train by which most London-bound travellers of the superior or first-class rank were accustomed to depart from Hawleigh was a nine-o'clock express. She thought it more than probable that Mr. Forde would go to London as the preliminary stage of his journey, and it was just possible that he might go by that train. If she called at his lodgings at eight o'clock, she would secure her desired interview; she knew his early habits, and that he had generally breakfasted and begun his day's work by that hour. Of what Mrs. Humphreys, the carpenter's wife, might say about this untimely visit, she thought nothing; being, indeed, at all times too impetuous for profound consideration of consequences.

She dressed herself quietly while Blanche was still asleep. They had a slip of a bath-room, converted from the oratory of some mediæval châtelaine, on one side of their tower; here Elizabeth made her toilette, and then crept softly out of the bed-chamber without awakening her sister from halcyon dreams of new curates yet hidden behind the curtain of fate. She went down the narrow winding stair, and out by the lobby door, unseen by so much as a servant; and walked, by field-paths and lanes that skirted the town, towards the tranquil domicile of Mr. Humphreys. She recalled that other summer morning nearly a year ago—good heavens! what a long year!—when she had gone by the same road to make the same kind of unauthorised visit, half in sport and half in earnest, defiant, reckless, eager to do something that would bring light and colour into her monotonous life, and desperately in love with the man she pretended to hold so lightly. Then she had gone to him with a proud sense of her power to conquer and bring him to her feet, as she had sworn to do the night before in the passion of wounded pride. Now she went humbled to the dust, convinced of her insignificance in the plan of his life; only anxious that he should not go away thinking worse of her than she deserved.

The street-door of the Humphreys' abode—radiant in the splendour of newly-polished brass-plate and handle—was standing open as she approached. Mrs. Humphreys, engaged in conference with the butcher, occupied the threshold, and paused from her discourse with an astonished air at seeing Miss Luttrell.

That air, that look of surprise, awakened the girl to a sense of the singularity of her untimely visit; the peril of petty gossip and small rustic scandal in which she stood. She made a feeble attempt to protect herself from this hazard.

"Good morning, Mrs. Humphreys," she said with a friendly air. "I have been for a before-breakfast walk round by the

common. It is so nice after London. I have a message from Mr. Forde from papa. Do you think he would come downstairs for a few minutes and hear all about it? I know he is a very early riser."

"O, Miss Luttrell, what a pity! leastways if it's anything very particular. Mr. Forde went away by the mail-train last night."

"He went last night!" Elizabeth repeated helplessly.

"Yes, miss. It wasn't like him to travel of a Sunday evening—after that moving sermon too; there wasn't a dry eye in the church, I do believe. But the ship he sails in—the *Columbius*—leaves Liverpool this afternoon, and there was no help for it. I do hope he'll have nice weather, poor dear gentleman!" added Mrs. Humphreys with a hopeful air, as if he had been about to cross the Straits of Dover.

This was a death-blow. He had gone away, and carried with him to the other end of the world the conviction of her faithlessness.

She went slowly homewards, wondering vaguely what she should do with the remnant of her life: how she was to live on for an indefinite number of years, and eat and drink and sleep, and pretend to be happy, now that he had vanished out of her existence for ever. Then a new anger against him was slowly kindled in her breast. How could he have been so hard, so cruel, as to leave her thus: without one last word of compassion and forgiveness, without a line of farewell?

"He saw me in the church last night," she thought, "and yet could leave me without one touch of pity. He can boast of the grandeur of his own prospects, the splendour of his own hopes, and he has not one thought for my broken life; he cares nothing what becomes of me."

She brooded over this unkindness with deep resentment. What right had he to take possession of her soul, and then cast her off coldly to this "beggarly divorcement"?

"What does he imagine will become of me?" she said to herself. "I suppose he thinks I shall marry Lord Paulyn in spite of his warning, and be miserable for ever afterwards. Or does he think I shall repent my sins and join some Protestant sisterhood; or die broken-hearted because of his unkindness? O, if I could only die! He might be sorry, perhaps, for that; if the news of my death ever reached his distant world; or if he were to come back to this place some day, and find my grave in the churchyard, and discover at last that I loved him well enough to die of his desertion."

Book the Third.

CHAPTER I.

“I am weary of my part.

My torch is out, and the world stands before me
Like a black desert.”

THRICE has the corn ripened on the hillsides and in the valley round Hawleigh; thrice have come and gone all the pleasant sights and sweet sounds of summer—dog-roses blooming out their bright brief life in the tangled hedgerows; honeysuckle scenting the mild air of early autumn, and lingering late as if loth to leave the earth it adorned. Thrice have come the snows and rains and general discomforts of winter—the conventional jovialities of Christmas, church decorations, charity dinners, infant-school festivities, the annual cakes and ale, the slow-passing Lent, while the chilly new-fledged spring flutters its weak wings timidly, like a tender bird too soon expelled from its nest into a bleak world. All the seasons, with their unvarying duties—the same things to be done over and over again every year—have come and gone three times, and still Gertrude trudges to and fro among her poor, scattering leaflets of consolation in the shape of small gray-paper-covered tracts; and still Diana embroiders a little and sketches a little, and yawns and indulges her constitutional headache a great deal, and laments languidly that the Luttrells are not a particularly fortunate family; and still Blanche, the pert and lively, demands of the unanswering skies when Providence is going to do something for the Luttrells.

There have been changes, however, at Hawleigh. One, a dismal change from the warmth and brightness of a comfortable easy-going life to the darkness and blankness of the grave. That good easy man, Wilmot Luttrell, has slipped out of existence almost as easily as he slipped through it. His daughters found him in his study one dark November morning, two years ago, stricken with paralysis and a partial death, from which he was never to recover. He lingered long in this doubtful state, helpless, patient, mild as he had ever been; was tenderly nursed by the four girls, who had at least agreed in loving their father dearly at the last—had lingered and been conscious of their love and care, until a second stroke made all a blank. From this he never revived, but expired in that dull sleep, unconscious of the end; so closing a life which had been as gentle and harmless as a child's.

This loss—a profound affliction itself—was made all the heavier by the fact that it left the four girls a difficult problem

to solve in the one all-important question how they were to live. The entire fortune which their father left behind him amounted to about three hundred a year, exclusive of the Vicarage furniture, which, in its decrepitude and shabbiness, may have been worth something less than a hundred pounds, and the Vicarage plate, worth a hundred more. With this income, and these belongings, the girls had to begin life for themselves. Aunt Chevenix came to the rescue with an offer of a hundred a year from her own purse, and advised that Elizabeth should come to live with her, and the three other girls go abroad somewhere, say Brussels or the south of France, where they could live genteelly and improve their minds, thereby escaping the loss of caste involved in any alteration of their style of living at Hawleigh. But to this they all objected. Elizabeth thanked her aunt for the offer of a home in Eaton-place, but preferred to remain where she was. "You would soon grow tired of me," she wrote, "when you discover how dreary a companion I now am. And forgive me for saying it, auntie, but your house was unlucky to me. I could not re-enter it without a feeling of horror."

Gertrude expressed her gratitude somewhat stiffly; declined to entertain the idea of lifelong banishment for the sake of gentility; hoped that she could more profitably improve her mind by the performance of her duties at Hawleigh than by the cultivation of any new accomplishments at Brussels or Lyons; was not ashamed of any diminution of style or luxury which their altered circumstances might call for; thanked Heaven she could live as contentedly beneath the humblest roof as beneath the loftiest; and farther informed her aunt that, with the consent of her sisters, she had decided on taking one of the small semi-detached villas, with bay-windows and nice little gardens, in the Boroughbridge-road. The furniture from the Vicarage, such of it as was adapted to this new abode, they would retain; also the tea-kettle, which was so touching a memorial of all they had lost.

Mrs. Chevenix shuddered as she read these two letters. Her nices in a semi-detached villa, at thirty-five pounds a year, in a row of other semi-detached villas of the same pattern! What a change from the fine old Vicarage, with its ins and outs and ups and downs, sunny bow windows, magnolia and myrtle shrouded walls, its quaint old tower, everlasting memorial of ancient splendour, its wide flower-garden and grassy orchard, sloping to the setting sun. What a change! And Gertrude wrote of it as coolly as if it were nothing.

"I think my poor brother might have left me the tea-kettle," thought Mrs. Chevenix: "it would have been very useful for afternoon tea, and it would have gone back to the girls afterwards."

She pondered upon Elizabeth's letter with a deep sigh.

"Yes," she said, "it is nothing but the truth; the girl is sadly changed. I hardly know if I should be able to do anything for her now. All her animation is gone; and she has acquired a proud reserved manner that would repel any one who was ever so much inclined to admire her. She is handsome still; but she certainly has contrived to render herself as unattractive as it is possible for a handsome young woman to be. Did ever any girl throw away such chances as she has had?"

This meditation was the result of a retrospective glance at affairs during Mrs. Chevenix's last visit to Hawleigh, in the autumn before her brother's death. Lord Paulyn had been at Ashcombe during that time, and had come frequently to the Vicarage, and done his best to renew his old intimacy with Elizabeth Luttrell. But to all these friendly endeavours the girl had opposed a dead blank wall of coldness and reserve. Mrs. Chevenix tried to gloss over this uncomfortable aspect of affairs, and to convince the lover that his suit was not yet hopeless; but it was in vain for the wily matron to soothe and argue. The young man answered her with smothered anger.

"There's no use in talking nonsense, Mrs. Chevenix," he said; "she has not forgotten that parson fellow yet, and I suppose she never means to forget him. What a pity you didn't let her have her own way and go out with him, and devote herself to the evangelisation of South-Sea Islanders! I wish with all my heart she had gone; for then I couldn't have made a fool of myself hanging about here, and exposing myself to the sneers of Hilda Disney and my mother."

"I cannot see that the affair is any business of Miss Disney's," Mrs. Chevenix remarked with some hauteur. How dared that independent young person to cross the woof of her schemes!

"Miss Disney has so little business of her own, that she's obliged to think of somebody else's," replied the Viscount moodily. "Why don't you bring her to London, ma'am?" meaning Elizabeth, and not Miss Disney. "You might cure her of this wretched infatuation there. I suppose she has the fellow's photograph, and kisses and cries over it every night."

"She has a great deal too much self-respect for that kind of thing," said Mrs. Chevenix, as if she had been inside Elizabeth's brain, and inspected its cellular arrangements.

It is possible that this suggestion of Lord Paulyn's may have had some influence with Mrs. Chevenix when she offered Elizabeth a permanent shelter in Eaton-place. That offer being rejected, she could only shrug her shoulders and resign herself to circumstances. The luxurious ease of her own existence, the scent-bottle and green fan, made a powerful armour against the slings and arrows of other people's bad fortune. If her favourite

niece preferred obscure poverty to rank and wealth, she must needs indulge her humour.

"After all, it makes no real difference to me," she said to herself. "I only lose the indirect advantage of connection with the peerage. Such an alliance must have given me the *entrée* to the very best society; and I feel that I could have been of the greatest use to a young woman suddenly elevated to such a position. But it is idle to regret the decrees of Providence."

So Mrs. Chevenix resigned herself to the inevitable, thanked Heaven that she possessed a good cook and a faultless dress-maker, and went her way calmly rejoicing, knowing no weariness of that unvarying round of tea-drinkings and dinner-eatings and at homes which she called good society. But she seldom omitted to search her *Morning Post* for any small record of Lord Paulyn's existence that might perchance adorn its columns, and she even went so far as to subscribe to a fashionable sporting newspaper which was more frequently graced by his lordship's name.

Life seemed new and strange to Elizabeth in the semi-detached villa on the Boroughbridge-road, strange with a bitter strangeness. A lofty soul should be, doubtless, independent of its earthly dwelling-place. "My mind to me a kingdom is;" "Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage." Very noble sentiments in their way, but not given to the common herd of humanity. Elizabeth's soul was not so lofty as to rise superior to the influences of her habitation. She felt the change of tenement sorely, felt like some lost creature in the square bandboxical rooms, the prim narrow passage with its pert gas-lamp, the steep straight stairs smelling of copal varnish; almost as ill at ease as some wild denizen of the forest that had been shifted, from the vast cavern where he roamed and rolled at large, to some straitened den in a zoological garden.

And the Vicarage furniture, objects which, from old association, these girls loved dearly, how mean and shabby and woe-gone that poor old furniture looked in the new smart rooms, with their cheap modern paper-hanging, and trumpery cornices, and sprawling plaster roses in the centre of their ceilings! The old cracked Chelsea shepherd and shepherdess, which had seemed the natural ornaments of the tall narrow wooden mantel-shelf in the Vicarage drawing-room, had the forlornest air upon the polished marble slab in the new house. Diana's grand piano filled the small back drawing-room, the big old cane-seated sofa blocked the bay-window in the front drawing-room. Nothing fitted into an embrasure, or adapted itself to the shape of the rooms; and it was only when Gertrude brought that inestimable quality which she called her common sense, and

which Blanche called her domineering way, to bear upon the subject, and by banishing this article and shifting the other, reduced the rooms to something like order, that they became simply habitable. Graceful, or elegant, or picturesque they never would be. Had the new tenants been able to buy bright modern furniture, on a toyshop scale, they might have endued the rooms with a certain doll's-house prettiness; but the salvage from the Vicarage looked what it was, the poor remnant of departed fortune.

There was a room downstairs, under the back drawing-room, half sunk in the earth, but provided with a small bay-window and a sham marble mantelpiece, and described by the house agent as a breakfast-room. This the Miss Luttrells made their refectory.

"Of course, in a decent house it would be the housekeeper's room," said Blanche, the day she first dined in this earthy chamber. "I shall always feel as if we were cheating the servants out of their natural rights by occupying it."

Thus began their new lives. Every one called upon them, and admired their new abode, and discussed the new Vicar, and sympathised and approved and consoled. And Gertrude pronounced with satisfaction that their social status remained firm as a rock. They had two servants, one an irreproachable parlour-maid, who was never seen without a starched muslin apron, and everything was done in the nicest manner. They had a garden which might have been covered by a good-sized turkey carpet, but which was laid out in the last approved style: flower-beds of the tessellated-pavement pattern; scrolls and parallelograms, and open-tart designs done in plants of the houseleek and mouse-ear tribes; jam-tart patterns in scarlet geranium and brown leafage, lobelia and petunia, after the manner of the Duchess of Wiltshire's parterre at the Cottage near Havistock. It is astonishing what great effects may be produced in the area of a turkey carpet by a young lady of Gertrude Luttrell's temperament.

"There is no one more ready to make sacrifices," she said complacently. "But whatever I have must be of the best."

To say that Elizabeth lived in this circumscribed home would be to say too much. She existed—as toads have been believed to exist locked in marble, or comfortably niched in a block of coal. Yet not so patiently as these quiescent reptiles did she bear her fate. Her lips were mute, it is true, for she had a scornful impatience of sisterly consolation, but her soul complained perpetually. Like Job, she remonstrated with her Maker, and demanded why she was not permitted to die. All the anguish of this slow dull year had not been enough even to undermine her vigorous young life. There was scarcely the

depression of a muscle in the firm round white arms, no cavernous hollows spoiled her oval cheeks. She was paler than of old; that fugitive colour which had come and gone in such flashes of brightness two years ago was rarely seen now; her eyelids had a heavy look that hinted of sleepless nights; but these were all the outward changes that had been wrought by Malcolm Forde's abandonment and her father's death.

"I never could have believed I loved my father so much," she said to herself sadly, one dismal December afternoon, when she had taken a lonely walk as far as the road before the Vicarage, and had seen the fire-glow shining through the old-fashioned casement of her father's study. She had stood for a little while looking across the lawn at that cheery glow, with an aching heart, a heart that seemed to ache from very emptiness.

"My little world has vanished like a dream," she thought, "the waters have swept over it, and left me standing on a barren rock in a great pathless sea. If I could only die, like papa, and make an end of it!"

Among those pleasing testimonies of the world's esteem which were offered to the sisters at this sad juncture was a ceremonious call from Lady Paulyn and Hilda Disney. The two ladies drove over from Ashcombe one afternoon in the ancient chariot, conducted by a postilion, who had the aspect of a farm-labourer in disguise, but at the same time looked more imposing than a coachman.

Hilda had her customary air of ladylike indifference, but the dowager peered and pryed, and expressed profoundest interest in the affairs of the four sisters.

"And you really think of remaining in this pretty little house," she said with a gracious wonder, peering at them keenly from under her shaggy old eyebrows all the while, and peering especially at Elizabeth. "Do you know I'm rather surprised at that. I should have thought this pokey old town would have been insufferable to you all after your loss, and that some nice place abroad would have suited you better, where you could have had a little pleasant English society in the nice inexpensive continental style—Bruges for instance, or Courtrai—I've heard there are English people at both those towns; or Dijon, or some retired little German town where things are cheap."

"I have duties and pleasures at Hawleigh which I could never have in a Roman Catholic town," said Gertrude.

"There seems to be a prevailing idea that transportation for life is the only remedy for our grief," said Elizabeth, not a little contemptuously. "I wonder our friends don't suggest Norfolk Island or Botany Bay at once. Or, since transportation is abolished, the government ought to erect a special building at

Portland or Dartmoor for young women who are left alone in the world."

The dowager vouchsafed no reply to these impertinent observations, but she gave Elizabeth a look from beneath those bristling penthouses which was not one of supreme affection.

"You haven't asked after my son, Miss Luttrell," she said, turning sharply upon Gertrude, after rather an awkward pause, during which Miss Disney had looked straight out of the window with an absent air, as if she had been assisting at a visit to cottagers in whose spiritual or temporal welfare she had no personal interest.

"I beg your pardon," stammered Gertrude, confused by this sharp attack. "I hope Lord Paulyn is well."

"He is very well, and I hope he is on the high road to being very happy."

Blanche, having nothing particular to do, and not feeling herself called upon to sustain any part in the conversation, happened to be amusing herself by the contemplation of Miss Disney. She saw the fair cold face flush, and the thin lips contract themselves ever so little at this moment.

"I suppose that means that he is going to be married," said Diana; "if one may be allowed to hazard a guess."

"How quick you young ladies are when marriage is in question!" replied the dowager graciously. "Yes, I have every reason to hope that Reginald has at last made up his mind to settle. It will be such a happiness to me if he can only be induced to give up that horrid racing stud, his place near Newmarket, and his dreadfully expensive stables in Yorkshire; but if he *can't* be persuaded to so wise a step, he will at any rate be better able to afford to ruin himself. The young lady to whom he is almost engaged is one of the richest heiresses in England. She has not rank, I admit; but the oppression of the income-tax has long since stamped out my Conservative proclivities. I have no prejudices, Miss Luttrell, and can appreciate the grandeur of position attained by a man who began life by wheeling barrows, and could now write a cheque for a hundred thousand pounds without feeling himself any poorer when it had been cleared. That is what I call true nobility."

"The barrows or the cheque-book, Lady Paulyn?" asked Elizabeth.

"The upward progress from one point to the other," replied the dowager with dignity. "I am told that Mr. Ramsay, the great contractor, eats peas with his knife, and is somewhat the slave of habit in the matter of not cleaning his nails. But I hope I have a soul above such trivialities. Nothing would give

me greater pleasure than to welcome Mr. Ramsay's only child as my daughter."

Having made this announcement, and even deigned to refresh herself with macaroons and cherry brandy (made two summers ago with the dear old Vicarage cherries from the orchard Elizabeth loved), Lady Paulyn departed. But not before she had again expressed her wonder that the Miss Luttrells should prefer Hawleigh to a delightful Belgian town, with canals and stiff little avenues, where they might pace to and fro, and sit on benches, unjostled by any vulgar crowd; or such a place as Dijon, which must surely be a most agreeable town for English residents, since the very name had quite a romantic sound. The dowager lingered so long to discuss these points after she had risen to take her departure, that it was dusk when the chariot went jingling off, to the delight of the adjacent villas.

"It was really very good of her to come," said Gertrude, watching the departing equipage complacently from the bay-window. "What a noise that postilion makes! It is a satisfaction to let our new neighbours see we are on visiting terms with the best county people. I trust I am above attaching an undue value to these things; but I do not pretend to be ignorant of their influence."

"Good of her, indeed!" cried Blanche indignantly. "Horrid old thing! Anybody could see that she came to crow over Lizzie. Wicked old sne-miser! I do verily believe she would like her son to marry the only daughter of Beelzebub if she had plenty of money."

"What a pity you didn't marry him when you had the opportunity, and keep mamma's pearl necklace, Lizzie!" Diana said, with a yawn. "It would have been advancement for all of us. And here we are screwed up for life, I suppose, in this pokey little house, instead of having the run of half-a-dozen splendid places.—Ring for tea, Blanche, please. If it were not for the comfort of our early cup of tea, I should be almost tired of life."

"Almost tired! I have hardly ever ceased to be tired of it since I was seventeen," exclaimed Elizabeth with infinite scorn.

"Only for one brief bright summer time of love and hope," she thought, by way of rider to that contemptuous speech.

She was silent for the rest of that evening, sitting idle in a shadowy corner apart, while the other three clustered round the lamp; Diana and Blanche engaged in elaborate fancy-work, which gave occasion for perpetual discussions about point de Venise, and Sorrento bars; Gertrude absorbed in a pious biography, from which she read stray passages now and then for the edification of her sisters. It was not a lively evening, any

more than the rest of the evenings which these young women spent together in the unfamiliar drawing-room, with its lingering odour of size and plaster-of-Paris; but their manner of life seemed to Elizabeth just a little more dreary than usual to-night.

She was meditating upon all she had lost—in love and ambition alike bankrupt; of all the dreams that she had dreamed, from her early visions of pomp and pleasure with some unknown being who should arise out of space, like king Cophetua, at the right moment, and lift her up to the high places of the earth, to her later and more womanly dream of sweet sacrifices made for the man she loved. And she had lost all. Of these much-cherished dreams there had come no fulfilment; and being older and wiser now, and having lost the faculty of dreaming, there was nothing left her but the dull realities of the waking world as represented by a trim little newly-built villa in the Borough-bridge-road.

“If I had been wiser, I suppose I should have fallen back upon my old ideas of life when Malcolm Forde flung me off, and married Lord Paulyn,” she thought. “A word would have brought him back to me. But now even that miserable alternative is lost, and there is nothing left for me but life for ever and ever shut up in this narrow den with my sisters. I might go and live with aunt Chevenix, certainly; but that would be just a little worse. I have lost all taste for the kind of society my aunt is so fond of, and I should have less liberty there than I have here.”

She thought a good deal about Lord Paulyn that night—not so much of him individually as of all that he could have given her—the grandeur, the independence, the power; that strong wine of pleasure which, if not happiness, was at least intoxication; that ideal existence among beautiful scenes, or surrounded with all the graces of art and luxury, the very dream of which had been fair enough to brighten her life in days gone by. He had offered her all these things, and she had rejected them, without a pang, for the love of Malcolm Forde.

“And how noble a return he made me for my constancy!” she thought bitterly, with more anger against her lost lover than she had felt for a long time.

After this, she thought very often about the brilliant position she had rejected, and for the first time thought of it with a vague regret. It was in her nature to hold a treasure lightly so long as it lay at her feet, and to appreciate it when it was lost to her. She had scorned the idea of a marriage with Lord Paulyn, while that faithful admirer had shown himself eager and devoted. She wondered a little at her own foolishness now that he was about to unite himself with some one else.

There may have been more excuse, perhaps, for these sordid

thoughts in the joylessness of her present existence. Her life was so utterly barren—every morning the beginning of a day which must needs be the repetition of yesterday—the to-morrows stretching before her blank as the pages of an unused memorandum-book.

It is true that she might have occupied herself, like Gertrude, in visiting the sick and poor, since she was gifted with the power of winning their confidence and even their affection. But she avoided this natural source of lonely spinsterhood with an obstinate aversion. What! go among these people whom she had served for *his* sake? Ally herself with the last new curate, a pale-faced slip of a man with sandy whiskers? Descend to all the trivialities of the district-visiting community now that *his* godlike form no longer moved among that common herd? This was what she could not do.

Even the grave old churches, in which she had sat from her youth upwards, were distasteful to her. Their aspect reminded her too keenly of all she had lost—the good harmless father—the lover she had loved so madly. She seemed to hear the echo of voices that sounded in those stony aisles no more.

The new Vicar was a pompous red-faced man, who very rarely fatigued himself with the litany or lessons, and who read the communion service in a fat voice, as if he had taken the ten commandments under his especial protection, and preached sermons on abstruse doctrinal points over the heads of his flock. The Vicar's wife was young and fashionable, and put the simple Hawleigh folks to shame by the elegance of her attire. She had essayed to patronise the Miss Luttrells, and had told them about the changes she meant to make by-and-by in that dreadful barn the Vicarage, and had congratulated them on their transference from that ancient tenement to a modern habitation. Diana and this lady got on very well together, but between the Vicaress and Elizabeth there prevailed a quiet antipathy.

It was, doubtless, her own fault that Elizabeth was lonely. Her sisters had their little batches of dear friends, and visited a good deal in a quiet way soon after their father's death, and entertained their acquaintance with afternoon tea; but Elizabeth's soul rebelled against this humdrum sociality; her footsteps refused to tread this beaten track of every-day provincial life. She preferred lonely wanderings in the very teeth of January's north-easters, on the common and in the familiar lanes where she had walked so joyously with her lover in the brief sweet days of courtship.

If she had cherished the faintest hope of his return to her, she might have been patient, she might have endured the weariness of the present, cheered by a fair vision of the future,

But she deluded herself with no such hope. She had, on the contrary, a settled conviction that, once having put his hand to the plough, for Malcolm Forde there would be no turning backward. She had lured him for a little while out of his chosen path; but having broken loose from her feeble snare, he was the very last of men to return to the net.

"He was always sorry that he loved me," she thought, "and there was a look of rapture on his face when he preached his farewell sermon, like the joy of a man who has escaped from a great peril."

They heard no more of Lord Pauly's approaching marriage, standing almost alone, so far as Hawleigh proper went, in the proud privilege of the dowager's acquaintance; but Gertrude and Diana were not slow to retail the news in their morning calls and five-o'clock teas. Miss Ramsay and her possessions were enlarged upon—the husbands and brothers referred to as authorities upon the commercial world—every one having his pet theory as to which Ramsay was the great Ramsay, who had begun by wheeling barrows; one party clinging tenaciously to a certain Peter Ramsay, Son, and Bilge, proprietors of the famous Red Cross steam-packet line; and another pinning its faith to Alexander Ramsay, the great contractor. Fashionable newspapers were watched, but shed no light upon the subject, nor did the local journals give tongue.

"I don't believe there's a syllable of truth in the whole story," exclaimed the outspoken Blanche during one of these discussions, from which Elizabeth was absent. "I daresay it's all that nasty old woman's invention. Lord Pauly was desperately in love with my sister Lizzie, and made her ever so many offers. And she, wicked old thing, wants us all to go and bury ourselves in some dead-and-alive Belgian town, where we should be driven mad by the carillon ringing every half-hour from the rickety old church-towers."

Miss Luttrell reproved her sister severely for the impropriety of these remarks, and the company generally looked incredulous. It was not to be supposed that any reasonable being would believe in Elizabeth's rejection of the Lord of Ashcombe. He might have hung about her a good deal—compromising her by his attentions, to the rupture of that foolish engagement with dear Mr. Forde; but to suppose that he had laid his coronet at her feet—that he had said to her, "Be mistress of Ashcombe in Devon, and Harberry Castle in Yorkshire, the Grange near Newmarket, and the old family mansion in St. James's-square"—and that she had deliberately rejected him—to believe this was too much for the imaginative power of Hawleigh.

Yet the day came before very long when the eyes of Hawleigh were opened, and the eyebrows of Hawleigh lifted in surpassing wonder.

CHAPTER II.

“O, the little more, and how much it is,
And the little less, and what worlds away!”

THE four sisters had inhabited the smart little box on the Boroughbridge-road about four months, when Elizabeth's scanty stock of patience came to an end. Gertrude's small despotism, Diana's languors and affectations and headaches, she could abide no longer. She was brought so much closer to these evils in that circumscribed abode. She had no hillside orchard whither to flee at any hour of the day or evening, even on cold spring nights, when the young moon was sailing through the clouds, and when Hawleigh had shut its shutters and lighted its lamps for the night, and it would have been an outrage of all the proprieties to go out for a walk; no airy turret, half bed-chamber and half sitting-room, where she could read or muse in solitude; only a neat little square bedroom, divided from Gertrude's by so fragile a partition that its inmates were wont to whisper like conspirators in their vesper talk.

The Vicar's death, too, had given Gertrude a new position in the home circle. She assumed the responsibility of their future life. She had chosen and taken the house, and selected the furniture they were to keep; and regulated the mode and manner of their new life, which friends and acquaintances of the past they were chiefly to cherish, and which they were gently and graciously to let drop. Gertrude kept the purse and the keys, regulated the expenditure, and held possession of the narrow store closets. The younger sisters could hardly order an extra cup of tea without permission, or breakfast in bed perchance on a bleak winter morning without inventing some ailment as an excuse for that indulgence. Diana submitted from sheer laziness.

“I must live with some one who will order my dinner and pour out my tea for me,” she said; “and it may as well be Gertrude as any one else. I daresay if I were rich enough to have a confidential maid, she would tyrannise over me.”

One day, towards the end of March, Elizabeth astonished her sisters by declaring her intention of going abroad straightway.

“I shall go over to Dieppe,” she said, “and wander through Normandy, and then make my way somehow to Belgium—my geographical ideas are the vaguest, but I shall find out everything when I am there—and then perhaps I shall go up the Rhine; and I don't think I shall come back till the winter. I have been reading up a foreign Bradshaw, and making tre-

audacious calculations about ways and means. O, by the bye, Gertrude, how much have we each to live upon? I know I can manage with it, for I mean to do things in a strong-minded economical way—travelling third-class, and even walking from one town to another when the distances are short; and third-class travelling is dirt-cheap on the Continent. I shall wear no fine washing dresses, nothing more expensive than a linsey gown and a waterproof cloak.”

Until this moment Gertrude had only been able to stare. Even the languid Diana dropped her novel, and looked her astonishment at this wild proposition.

“Are you mad, Elizabeth?” exclaimed the eldest sister sternly; “or do you mean this for a joke?”

“I am not mad, not a wee bit wud, as the Scotch say”—she had read a little of Burns with her lover—“and I have long left off joking. Pray don’t look so unutterably shocked, Gerty. I really mean what I say. What is the use of all this talk about women’s rights if one is to be pent up all one’s life in a place like this in order to do homage to the proprieties? Hawleigh is killing me by inches. I shouldn’t at all mind dying, but I don’t want to die of slow poison; and my present life is poison to me—worse than infinitesimal doses of antimony.”

“Very flattering to the relatives you live with,” suggested Gertrude with dignity.

“O, I don’t mean you; but this house, Hawleigh, everything. Old Lady Paulyn was right; we ought to have gone on the Continent. Not to settle down in some prosy old place, as she suggested, but to wander about. People do not half live who live in one place.”

“The roving existence you talk of may be very well for persons of your impatient temperament,” said Gertrude; “but for my own part, I could not live without a settled home; and I believe that Diana and Blanche share my feelings on that point.”

“I’m not quite sure of that, Gerty,” said the intractable Blanche. “Hawleigh is very well in its way, and we know plenty of people, and are sure to be asked to ever so many croquet-parties in the summer. But I should dearly love roaming about the world with Lizzie.”

“In a linsey gown and a waterproof?” cried Diana incredulously. “What would you do with all the time you spend before your looking-glass in that case?”

“I could get on without a looking-glass if there was something worth living for,” said the damsel.

“Do not let us descend to puerilities,” observed Gertrude, with her air of practical wisdom. “Such a mode of life as Elizabeth suggests is quite out of the question. Imagine my

sister wandering about alone, in third-class carriages, stopping at second-rate inns, exposing herself to insult from underbred foreigners."

"That is only your insular prejudice," said Elizabeth. "Remember all the nice books we've read about lady-travellers—'From Ostend to the Tyrol for a Five-pound Note;' 'Third-class Passengers to the Jungfrau;' 'Meat-teas and Glaciers; or a Maiden Aunt's Adventures in Savoy;' and so on. Those books seem all to be written by unprotected females of limited means. Why shouldn't I get on just as well as other unprotected females?"

"If you were forty years of age, the idea might be somewhat less preposterous."

"Would it? I am sure I feel as if I were sixty. But however that may be, I must positively get away from Hawleigh. The air of the Boroughbridge-road disagrees with me. You must give me my share of our income, Gerty——"

"Which would be about seventy-five pounds."

"Is it really so much as that? I should feel immensely rich on the Continent with thirty shillings a week."

"You appear to forget that this house was taken with a view to joint occupation."

"You can keep ten pounds a year for my share of the rent and taxes."

Gertrude argued for an hour, and even Diana took the trouble to remonstrate. But it was in vain that both ladies endeavoured to demonstrate the actual impossibility of such a life as Elizabeth proposed to lead. The girl was inflexible.

"I am of age," she said; "and no one has the faintest right to curtail my liberty. I have set my heart upon getting away from Hawleigh. Blanche can go with me if she likes. She and I have always got on very well together; but if she doesn't like, I shall go alone."

"I suppose you forget that you have expectations from aunt Chevenix," said Gertrude, as a final argument; "and that such a step as you contemplate is likely to alienate her affection for ever."

"I have never allowed expectations to stand in my way," answered Elizabeth scornfully; "and as I can live upon a pound a week, I can afford to be independent of aunt Chevenix."

Remonstrance being useless, the two elder sisters bewailed their sister's folly in secret. It was a complete disruption of the small household. Blanche elected to follow the fortunes of Elizabeth, agreeing to pay her share of the rent during her absence. The most melancholy point in the whole affair was the diminution of state which this severance would necessitate. One of the two servants—the irreproachable parlour-maid, who

would have to be dismissed, now that the cost of her maintenance could be no longer shared by the four sisters. This fact moved both Gertrude and Diana more deeply than the loss of their younger and wilder sisters.

Providence, however, had a care for their interests; and an event was looming in the future which was destined to alter Elizabeth's views, or rather to present her with a more brilliant opportunity of escape from the life that had become obnoxious to her.

She was walking alone one gusty afternoon, about a week after the first discussion of her foreign wanderings, and had rambled farther than usual on the road between Hawleigh and Ashcombe—a road that was little better than a winding lane that meandered through a long valley at the foot of the moor, following the course of a stream that brawled and babbled over its rocky bed, in the winter swollen to the dimensions of a river, and in dry summers vanished altogether from the eye of man, leaving its bare stony bed to bleach in the sun. The deep banks of the lane were thickly clothed with greenest ferns in the late summer time; but at this season there were only a few violets nestling in the mossy turf, through which the red rich soil of the West peeped here and there in ruddy patches.

This lane was a favourite walk of Elizabeth's. Young oaks and older Scotch firs rose like a forest on one side; the steep shoulder of the moor shut it in on the other. A solitary darksome place, in the chill March dusk, gloomy with Nature's pensive gloom—a very cloister in which to meditate upon the faults and follies of her blighted life.

The boundary of her longest rambles was an old stone bridge about three miles from Hawleigh, at a point where the stream widened and made a sharp curve across the road; a very ancient bridge, covered with gray old mosses and pale sea-green lichens; and supposed to have been built by those indefatigable road-makers the Romans.

Here she lingered this afternoon, resting a little, with her folded arms upon the parapet, watching the faint pale moon driven wildly through a cloudy gray sky.

"I don't suppose I shall be any happier abroad than I am here," she said to herself, ruminating upon her new scheme of life; "but I shall at least have something to do, and I shall not have so much time for thought if I keep jogging on from one place to another."

This was the result of all her meditations that afternoon. She looked forward to the change in her existence not with actual pleasure, only with a vague hope of relief.

She had been standing on the bridge about ten minutes, now following the moon till she was lost in a sea of clouds, now

watching the water gurgling over the stones, when she heard the approach of a horseman in the quiet lane; some farmer, no doubt. She did not trouble herself to look round; but waited till he should pass before beginning her homeward walk.

He rode briskly enough up to the hedge, then slackened his pace, and rode slowly across; then to her surprise drew rein suddenly on the other side, sprang from his horse, and came towards her.

“Miss Luttrell, is it really you?”

She turned quickly, her pale face flushing in the twilight. It was the first time she had ever blushed at his coming.

“Lord Paulyn!” she exclaimed; as much surprised by his appearance as if she had been a thousand miles from his domains.

“I thought I could not be mistaken,” he cried, holding out both his hands, but only receiving one of hers, and that one given with a reluctant air; “but I should never have expected to find you in this wretched lane—alone, too. I—I haven’t seen you since the Vicar’s death, and I ought to have written, I dare say, but I’m not a dab—I mean, I’m a poor hand at penmanship. I should have telegraphed to you to say how sorry I was, only I knew my mother would do all that kind of thing.”

“Thanks. I don’t think anybody’s condolence is of much use in such cases, however well meant. One loses all one has to love in the world, and one’s friends write polite letters, with quotations from Scripture, which are usually incorrect.”

This with a faint attempt at carelessness, but with tears rising unbidden to her eyes.

“But you haven’t lost all you love,” seizing upon the small black-gloved hand, and possessing himself of it in spite of her—“at least not all who love you; that is to say, there is one foolish beggar I can vouch for who still loves you to distraction.”

“I am not at all aware of any such person’s existence. Let go my hand, please, Lord Paulyn; you are pressing the rings into my fingers.”

“I beg your pardon,” unwillingly releasing it. “But don’t pretend not to know, Elizabeth; that is too bad. I dare say other fellows have made themselves foolish about you; but you know who I mean when I talk of loving you to distraction. You know that there never was any man so infatuated as I have been—as I still am, worse luck!”

“About Miss Ramsay, I presume;” with a chilling air.

“Come, now, Lizzie, don’t be absurd. Has my mother been letting out any of her fine schemes for getting me to marry Sarah Ramsay?—a young woman of thirty, with freckles and sandy hair, and about as much figure as a broomstick. She’s to have something like half a million of money, I believe, for her marriage portion; and a million or two when her father departs

this life. My mother picked her up at Torquay in the autumn, and has been trying it on ever since, but without effect. I'm the kind of horse that may be brought to the water, but I don't drink unless I'm thirsty."

"Lady Paulyn told me that you were going to be married to Miss Ramsay; that it was a settled thing."

"Then she told you an infernal lie."

A little thrill of pleasure stirred Elizabeth's heart at this unfilial observation. It was not that she liked Lord Paulyn, or that she was proud of his constancy, or grateful for his affection, or that she had at that moment any idea of marrying him. She was merely pleased to discover that she had not been superseded; that she still retained her dominion over him, still held him in her thrall; that she could go home to her sisters, and tell them how egregiously they had been duped by the dowager's diplomatic falsehoods.

"No, Lizzie, I never cared for any one but you," the young man went on, after he had muttered his indignation at the dowager's attempt to deceive; "and I suppose I shall go on caring for you till the end of my days. It's the most miserable infatuation. Do you know that I am tolerably safe to win the Derby this year, with a horse I bred myself; his sire was one of the old Dutchman's stock, and his dam was sister to Styriax, who won the Two Thousand six years ago, and the Chester Cup the year after? Yes, Lizzie, I think the Derby's a safe thing this year; and yet I set no more value upon it than if it was nothing. Think of that, Lizzie—the blue ribbon of the turf. I've been winning no end of things lately; yacht races and so on last year, and a cup at Newmarket the other day. It's the old adage, you know: unlucky in love—but I'd rather win you for my wife than half-a-dozen consecutive Derbies. Come now, Liz, it's all off with that other fellow; he's off the course, the Lord knows where. What is there to stand between us?"

"Merely the fact that Mr. Forde is the only man I ever loved, and I am not quite sure I don't love him still. I owe you at least candour. It is a very humiliating confession to make; but I do not mind telling you that I loved him very dearly, and that my heart was almost broken by his desertion."

"Confounded snob!" said the Viscount; "but I'm very glad he did make himself scarce. It would have been a most unsuitable match; a splendid girl like you, born to adorn a coronet and all that kind of thing. But I say, Lizzie——"

"Who gave you leave to call me by my Christian name?" she asked, looking round at him indignantly. She had been staring at the little river hurrying over its rugged bed, hardly seeming to listen to Lord Paulyn's discourse. He had his

horse's bridle on his arm, and found some hindrance to eloquence in the restlessness of that animal.

"O, come now. It's not much of a privilege to ask, after standing all I've stood for you, and being laughed at by my friends into the bargain. But I say, Elizabeth, I want to talk to you seriously. I only ran down from London by last night's limited mail; and the chief motive that brought me here was the thought that I might find you a little better disposed towards me, when the edge of your feelings about that parson fellow had worn off. You've had time to grow wiser since we last met, and to find out that there's something more in the world than sentimental parsons. By Jove, I should think Hawleigh was a favourable place for reflection; a regular Hervey's-Meditations-among-the-Tombs kind of a place. You've had time to think it all over, Lizzie; and I hope you've made up your mind you might be happier knocking about the world with me than moping alone here. Be my wife, Lizzie. I've been constant to you all this time, though you always treated me badly. You can't be so hard-hearted as to refuse me now?"

She was slow to answer him, still watching the swift-flowing river, as if she were seeking some augury in the gurgle of the waters. Even when she did speak, it was with her eyes still bent upon the stream.

"I know that I am supremely miserable here," she said, "and that is all I know about myself."

"But you might be happier in the world, Lizzie, with me. Who could be anything but miserable moping in such a hole as this?" demanded Lord Paulyn, with a contemptuous glance at the darkening moorland, as if it had been the meanest thing in nature.

She scarcely heeded the manner of his speech or the words that composed it. She was debating a solemn question; holding counsel with herself. Should she astonish all her friends—prove that she, the rejected of Malcolm Forde, could mount to dazzling worlds beyond their ken? The days of her humiliation had been very bitter to her; she had eaten ashes for bread, and moistened them with angry tears. The fact that she cared nothing for this man, that her chief feeling about him was a sentiment verging upon contempt, hardly entered into her thoughts to-night; they were too exclusively selfish. Self was the very centre of her little world. Her own humiliation, her own disappointments, made up the sum-total of her universe. Whatever was womanly, or true, or noble in her nature had begun and ended with her love for Malcolm Forde.

An hour ago and she had believed Lord Paulyn as completely lost to her as her father's curate, and she had begun to regret the folly that had cost her all the splendours of that brighter

world which had seemed so very fair to her two years ago. And behold! here was the constant lover again at her side, again offering her his rank and wealth, not from the haughty altitude of a King Cophetua to his beggar-maid, but urging his plea like a condemned felon beseeching the reversal of his doom.

Busy thoughts of what her life might be in the years to come if she accepted him—busy thoughts of the dull blank it needs must be if she rejected him—crowded her brain. Selfishness, ambition, pride—all the worst vices of her nature—won the victory. She turned to her lover at last, with a face that was very pale in the dim light, and said slowly,

“If you really wish it, if you are content to take me without any profession of love or sentiment on my side—I made an end of those when I quarrelled with my first lover—if you can be satisfied with such an indifferent bargain——”

“If!” cried the young man with sudden energy, putting his disengaged arm round her reluctant figure, which recoiled involuntarily from that token of appropriation; “that means Yes, and you’ve made me the happiest fellow in Devonshire. The horse that can stay is the winner after all. I always said I’d have you for my wife, Lizzie, and now I shall keep my word.”

From that moment her doom was sealed. There was no looking backward. Lord Paulyn took possession of his prize with the iron hand of some lawless sea-ranger swooping upon a disabled merchantman that had drifted across his track. From that hour Elizabeth Luttrell had a master.

CHAPTER III.

“Lorsqu’un homme s’ennuie et qu’il sent qu’il est las
De traîner le boulet au bague d’ici bas,
Dès qu’il se fait sauter, qu’importe la manière?”

ELIZABETH’S manner that evening was just a little colder and quieter than usual. No unwonted flutter of her spirits betrayed the fact that the current of her life had been suddenly turned into a new channel. She had suffered her lover to accompany her to the edge of that suburb in which the Boroughbridge-road was situated, and had there dismissed him.

“I may come to see you to-morrow, mayn’t I?” he pleaded. He had been trying to make her fix an early date for their marriage all the way along the dusky lane.

“We must be married and have our wedding-tour over before the Derby, you know,” he said persuasively. “You don’t care much about the touring business, do you? I’m sure I don’t. I never could understand why newly-married people should be

sent to stare at mountains, and do penance in musty old cathedrals, as if they'd done something wicked, and were obliged to work it out somehow before they could get absolution. A week at Malvern would be about our figure: or if we had tolerable weather, I could take you as far as Malta in the Pixy."

"You are in a great hurry to settle matters; but when I promised to marry you, just now, I said nothing about the date of our marriage."

"But that goes without saying. I've served my apprenticeship. You're not going to turn round upon me like Laban, and offer me one of your sisters, or make me work seven years longer. And if you have made up your mind to marry me, it can't matter to you whether it's soon or late."

"What will Lady Paulyn say?" asked Elizabeth, with a little laugh. There was something pleasant in the idea of that wily matron's mortification.

"My mother will be rabid," said the dutiful son; "but so she would whomsoever I married, unless it was for bullion. It was a good joke her coming to try and choke you off with that story about Sarah Ramsay. Yes; my mother will be riled."

"And Miss Disney? do you think she will be pleased?"

The Viscount was not so prompt in his answer this time.

"Hilda," he said meditatively; "well, I don't know. But I suppose she'll be rather glad. It'll give her a home, you see, by and by, when my mother goes off the hooks. She couldn't have lived with me if I'd been single."

"Of course not. We shall have Miss Disney to live with us, then, by and by?"

"In the natural course of events, yes; my mother can't go on nursing the Ashcombe estate till the Day of Judgment, though I've no doubt she'd like very much to do it. And when she's dead, and all that kind of thing," continued his lordship pleasantly, "Hilda can have an attic and a knife and fork with us, unless she marries in the interim, and I don't think that's likely."

"She looks rather like a person who has had what people call 'a disappointment,'" suggested Elizabeth, wincing a little as she remembered her own disappointment.

"She came into the world with a disappointment," replied Lord Paulyn. "Her mother ate the sour grapes, and her teeth were set on edge. Her father, Colonel Disney, was heir-presumptive to a great estate, when my aunt Sybilla married him; but when his uncle died, six months after the Colonel's marriage, a claimant sprang up with a rigmorole story of a Scotch marriage, and no end of documentary evidence, the upshot of which was, that after a good deal of Scotch law, and pursuing and defending and so on, the claimant—a black-muzzled lad

with a dip of the tar-brush—walked over the course, and Hilda's father was left with a large fortune in the hands of the Jews, in the shape of post-obits and accommodation bills. He ran away with a French opera-dancer soon afterwards, in a fit of disgust with society. My aunt and Hilda were left to drag on somehow upon a pittance which my grandfather, a stingy old beggar, had settled upon his daughter when she married. When my aunt died, Hilda came to live with my mother, and has had a very pleasant time of it ever since, I make no doubt."

They parted at the beginning of the villas that were dotted along the first half mile or so of the Boroughbridge-road, giving a trim suburban aspect to this side of Hawleigh. There were even gas-lamps, macadam, and a general aspect of inhabitedness very different from the narrow lanes and rugged common on the other side of the town. This new neighbourhood was the west-end of Hawleigh.

"I shall come to see you to-morrow," repeated Lord Paulyn, reluctant to depart. "And mind, everything must be over and done with before May. Do you remember the first Derby we were at together, nearly two years ago? Jolly, wasn't it? I've got a new team for the drag, spankers. I've set my heart upon your seeing Young Englander win. Hadn't you better write to Mrs. Chevenix? She's the woman to do our business. If you trust everything to your sisters, they'll be a twelvemonth muddling about it."

"We have plenty of time for discussing these arrangements, without standing in the high-road to do so," said Elizabeth impatiently. "If I had known you were going to worry me, I should never have said what I did just now. After all, it was only said on the impulse of the moment. I may change my mind to-morrow morning."

"O no, you won't. I won't stand anything of that kind. I am not like that parson fellow. Once having got you, I mean to keep you. I think I deserve some reward for holding on as I've done. You mustn't talk any more about throwing me over; that's past and done with."

"Then you mustn't worry me," said Elizabeth, with a faint sigh of utter weariness. "So now good night for the last time. It is past seven o'clock, and my sisters will think I am lost. I almost wonder they haven't sent the bellman after me."

And thus they parted, without the kiss of betrothal, which Miss Luttrell would not consent to receive in the high-road. But he had kissed her once in the lane; passionate lips pressed against unwilling lips, typical of that union which was to be no union; only self-interest and selfish short-lived passion going hand in hand.

"O, dear," thought Elizabeth, as she went in at the little

garden gate, and knocked with the doll's-house knocker on the doll's-house door; "what a tiresome thing it is to be engaged!"

She had thought very differently two years ago, when her willing head rested for the first time on Malcolm Forde's breast, and a supreme contentment, which seemed more of heaven than of earth, descended on her soul—a perfect restfulness, like the serene stillness of a rescued vessel that lies at anchor in some sheltered harbour after long battling with wind and waves.

"How he begins to worry me already," she thought of her new master. "I foresee that he will make me do whatever he likes, unless he goes too far, and rouses the spirit of opposition in me. But Gertrude and Diana will not be able to crow over me any longer, that is one comfort. And I have done with small rooms and a small income, that is another."

Her sisters had drunk tea, and dismissed the urn and tea-pot, and a cold and somewhat sloppy cup of their favourite beverage had been set aside for her on a little tray. She smiled involuntarily, as she threw off her hat, and sat down in a corner to sip the cold tea, thinking how, in a very short time, pompous serving-men would hasten to administer to her wants, and her coming in and going out would be an affair of importance to a vast household. She sat in her corner looking listlessly at her sisters, grouped round the lamp, and engaged in their usual avocations, and could not help feeling that it was really very good of her to endure these small surroundings, even for the moment.

"Where have you been all this time, Lizzie?" exclaimed Blanche, looking up from the construction of some futility in bead-work. "At the Melvin's, I suppose, kettle-drumming?"

"No; I went for a longer walk than usual, and forgot how late it was."

"And have been roaming about alone after dark," said Gertrude, with a horrified look. "Really, Elizabeth, if you must indulge your eccentric taste for solitary rambles, you might at least respect the opinion of the world so far as to gratify your strange taste within reasonable hours."

"I have no respect for the opinion of the world. I have outraged it once, and perhaps may outrage it again."

"Which way did you go?" asked the pacific Blanche, anxious to change the subject.

"Towards Ashcombe."

"I wonder when Lord Paulyn is to be married?" said Diana, contemplating some grand effect in a square inch of point lace.

"Rather soon, I believe."

"Where did you hear that? Come now, you must have been calling somewhere, or you would not have heard the news."

"I have not been calling anywhere, but I have reason to

believe Lord Paulyn is going to be married, and rather soon."

"There's nothing new in that," said Diana; "the dowager told us as much."

"Would you like to be bridesmaids on the occasion, all of you?" asked Elizabeth.

"What, bridesmaids to that horrid Miss Ramsay?" cried Blanche.

"No, not to Miss Ramsay—but to me."

The youngest and most energetic of the Luttrells sprang from her seat, very nearly overturning the moderator-lamp in her excitement.

"To you! O, you darling, you have been cheating us all this time, and are you really going to be a great lady, and present us all at court, and give no end of balls and parties? It's too good to be true."

"And as we had no ground for such an idea yesterday, when you were full of your continental wanderings, I really can't understand why we are to believe in such a thing to-night," observed Gertrude the pragmatist, with a spiteful look.

"Can't you? There are some people in whose lives great changes seem to happen by accident. The accident of a wicked anonymous letter helped to break off my engagement with Mr. Forde," with a keen glance at her eldest sister. "A chance meeting with Lord Paulyn this evening on the Roman bridge has altered my plans for going to Normandy. He made me an offer again to-night, for the third time in his life, and——"

"And you accepted him," said Diana. "You must have been nearer idiotcy than I should think a Luttrell could be, if you rejected him."

"But there is such a thing as constancy even to an idea," said Gertrude. "I should have thought Elizabeth would have cared more for the memory of Malcolm Forde than for worldly advantages."

"No," answered Elizabeth defiantly, "I am not so slavish as to go on breaking my heart about a man for ever. And living screwed up in this box of a house has taught me the value of surroundings."

"You will go to live at Ashcombe, I suppose," suggested Gertrude, "with the dowager and Miss Disney? I can fancy how nice that will be for you."

"I shall do nothing of the kind. I mean to live in the world, in the very centre of the great whirlpool—to go spinning round perpetually in the fashionable maelstrom."

"A hazardous life for the welfare of an immortal soul," said Gertrude.

"I have ceased to care for **my** soul since Malcolm gave me up.

Indeed, I have a suspicion that my soul ceased to exist when he went away, leaving only some kind of mechanism in its place."

CHAPTER IV.

"*Hoyden.* This very morning my lord told me I should have two hundred a year to buy pins. Now, nurse, if he gives me two hundred a year to buy pins, what do you think he'll give me to buy fine petticoats?"

"*Nurse.* O, my dearest, he deceives thee foully, and he's no better than a rogue for his pains. These Londoners have got a gibberish with 'em would confound a gipsy. That which they call pin-money is to buy their wives everything in the varsal world, down to their very shoe-ties."

UNBOUNDED was the rapture of Mrs. Chevenix when she received the unlooked-for tidings of Elizabeth's engagement. She wrote at once urging that the wedding should take place in London. "It will be just the height of the season," she said, "and everybody in town. Gertrude, Di, and Blanche can come up with you. I will stretch a point, and find rooms for all of you. You could not possibly be married from that footy little house in the Boroughbridge-road. And there will be your trousseau, you know, dear, a most serious question; for of course everything must be in the highest style, and I really doubt whether Cerise—whose real name, by the bye, I have lately discovered to be Jones—is quite up to the mark for this occasion. She suits me very well, but I have lately discovered a want of originality in her style; so I think the better way would be to order your superior dinner and evening dresses from Paris, and give Cerise only the secondary ones. Believe me, my dear child, I shall not shrink from expense; but we will not fall into that foolish trick of ordering more dresses than you could wear in six months, ignoring the almost hourly changes of fashion. As Lord Paulyn's wife, you will, of course, have unlimited means. By the way, as you have really no responsible male relative, the arrangement of settlements will devolve upon me. My lawyers, Messrs. Pringle and Scrupress, are well up in that kind of work, and will, I am sure, protect your interests as carefully as if you were the daughter of their oldest and most important client."

This subject, thus mooted for the first time in Mrs. Chevenix's letter, was destined to cause a good deal of argument and unpleasantness between the aunt and niece.

"I will have no settlement," said Elizabeth resolutely. "I take nothing to him, except sixty or seventy pounds a year, and he shall not be asked to settle ever so many hundreds upon me. I will not *quite* sell myself. Of course, he will give me fine

dresses and all I can want to make a brilliant figure in his own world. He has been patient enough and devoted enough for me to trust my interests to him. It stands to reason that I shall always have as much money as I can spend. He is overflowing with riches, and as his wife I shall have a right to my share of them. But I will not allow any one to ask him to name the price that he is willing to give for me. It shall not be quite a matter of buying and selling."

"Very high-flown notions, and worthy of the most self-willed unreasonable young woman that ever lived," exclaimed Mrs. Chevenix in a rage. "But I suppose you would hardly wish your children to starve. You will not object to *their* interests being provided for by people who know a little more about life than you do, self-opinionated as you may be."

"My children!" said Elizabeth, turning very pale. Could there be children, the very sanctification and justification of marriage, for her and for Reginald Paulyn, who in marriage sought only the gratification of their own selfish and sordid desires? *My* children! I can hardly fancy that I shall ever hear a voice call me mother. I seem so unfit to have little children loving me and trusting in me, in their blind childish way," she added dreamily; and then, with a more practical air: "Do what you please to protect their interests, auntie, in case Lord Paulyn should gamble away all his wealth on the race-course; but remember, for me myself not a penny."

Nor was this an idle protest. She took care to give the family solicitors the same injunctions; and as Lord Paulyn was not a man to insist on extreme generosity in the preliminary arrangements of his marriage, he did not dispute her will. So certain estates were settled upon such younger sons as Elizabeth might hereafter bring to her husband, and certain smaller properties were charged with the maintenance of daughters; but the wife herself was left subject to the husband's liberality. Mrs. Chevenix shook her head ominously.

"Was there ever anything so foolish? After what we have seen of that old woman too!" she added, with somewhat disrespectful mention of her niece's future mother-in-law."

Their knowledge of the dowager was certainly not calculated to inspire any exalted hope of the son's generosity. Yet, in that foolish period which went before his marriage, Reginald Paulyn showed himself lavish in the gifts which he showered upon his mistress. Did she but frown, he propitiated her with an emerald bracelet; was she angry with him without reason, she had her reward in a triplet of rings, red, white, and green, like the Italian flag. The Paulyn diamonds, which had lain *perdu* since the dowager's last appearance at court, were dug out of the bank, and sent to be reset at a famous West-end jeweller's.

Elizabeth beheld their far-darting rays with dazzled eyes, and a mind that was almost bewildered by this fulfilment of all her childish dreams. It was like the story of Cinderella; nor does one know by any means that Cinderella cared very much about the Prince. The old fairy tale is hardly a love story, but rather a romance of horses and carriages, and other worldly splendour, and swift transition from a kitchen to a palace.

"After all, it was perhaps very lucky that Mr. Forde jilted me," Elizabeth thought in her worldly-minded moments, when she was taken to look at the carriages which Lord Paulyn had chosen for her. The graceful shell-shaped barouche, the dainty brougham, with innumerable patent inventions for the comfort of its occupant.

There had been no Paulyn town-house since the reign of George III., when Reginald's grandfather had inhabited a gaunt and dismal mansion out Manchester-square way, the freehold of which had been settled upon a younger son, and had, in due course, been forwarded to a money-lender. The dowager, in her day, had preferred living in furnished lodgings during her residences in the capital. So Elizabeth had the delight of choosing an abode at the West-end, and finally, after exploring all the more fashionable quarters, selected a corner house in Park-lane, all balconies and verandahs, with a certain pleasing rusticity.

"You must build me a huge conservatory on the top of that hideous pile of stabling and kitchens at the back," she said to her lover, to whom she issued her orders somewhat unceremoniously at this period of their lives; "and I must have a fernery or two somewhere."

The selection of furniture for this balconied abode was an agreeable amusement for Miss Luttrell's mornings during the few weeks she spent in Eaton-place, and was not without its effect upon the balance Lord Paulyn kept at his bank, which was an unusually small one for so wealthy a customer. The young lady showed a marvellous appreciation of the beautiful in art, and an aristocratic contempt for all questions of cost. She had her pet forms and colours, her caprices upon every subject, the gratification whereof was apt to be expensive.

"She's like Lady Teazle, by Jove," grumbled the Viscount, opening his heart to a friend in the smoking-room of his favourite club, after a long morning at Kaliko's, the crack upholterer; "spends a fellow's money like water; and, by Jove, I feel sometimes inclined to growl, like the old buffer in the play."

"Shaw to be so," said his friend, "if a feller marries a poor man's daughter. They always make the money fly like old boots; haven't been used to it, and like to see it spin; just like a child that spins a sovereign on a table."

"If she were always to go on like this, she would be the ruin of me," murmured Reginald ruefully; "but of course it's only a spurt; and if she were inclined to do it by and by, I shouldn't let her."

"Of course not. You'll be able to put on a stiffish curb when once she's in harness."

This capacity for extravagance exhibited by his future wife gave Lord Paulyn subject for some serious thought. Even that refusal of a settlement, which, at the first glance, seemed so generous an impulse upon the part of Elizabeth, now assumed an alarming aspect. Might she not have refused any stated pin-money simply because she intended to put no limit upon her expenditure? She meant to range at will over the whole extent of his pastures, not to be relegated to an allotted acreage, however liberal. She meant, in fact, to do her best to ruin him.

"But that's a matter which will easily adjust itself after we are married," he said to himself, shaking off the sense of wild alarm which for the moment had possessed him. "I won't have my income made ducks and drakes of even to please the handsomest woman in Europe. A town-house once bought and furnished is bought and furnished for our lifetime, and for our children and grandchildren after us; so a little extravagance in that line can't do much harm. And as to milliners and all that kind of thing, I shall let her know as soon as possible that if her bills go beyond a certain figure, she and I will quarrel; and so, with a little judicious management, I daresay I shall soon establish matters on a comfortable footing."

So for these few weeks, her last of liberty, Lord Paulyn suffered his betrothed to have her own way—to have her fling, as he called it himself. Whatever her eye desired, as she roved at large in Kaliko's treasure-chambers, was instantly booked against her future lord. The rarest Sèvres; the most exquisitely-carved ebony cabinets, inlaid with plaques of choice old Wedgwood; easy-chairs and sofas, in which the designer's imagination had run riot; fairy-like coffee-tables; inimitable what-nots; bedroom furniture in the ecclesiastical gothic style, unpolished oak, with antique brazen clamps and plates—furniture that might have been made for Mary Stuart, only that it was much handsomer than anything ever provided for that hapless lady's accommodation, as witness the rickety old oaken bedstead at Holyrood, and King James's baby-basket; carpets from Elizabeth's own designs, where all the fairy ferns and wild-flowers that flourish in Devonian woods bestrewed a ground of russet velvet pile.

Of such mere sensuous pleasure, the rapture of choosing pretty things for her own possession, Elizabeth had enough in the days before her marriage. She was almost grateful to the

man whose purse provided these delights. Perhaps if she could have quite put Malcolm Forde out of her thoughts, exiled his image from her mind for ever and ever, she might have been actually grateful, and even happy, in the realisation of her pet day-dream.

She had asked after her old friends of the Rancho when she first came to London, but found that hospitable mansion had disappeared, like Aladdin's palace when the Emperor of China looked out of the window and beheld only empty space where his parvenu son-in-law's residence had stood. The Cinqmars had been ruined somehow; no one—at any rate not any one in Mrs. Chevenix's circle—seemed to understand how. Mr. Cinqmars had been bankrupt, his name in the papers as journalist, stockbroker, theatrical manager, wine merchant—goodness knows what; and the Rancho estate had been sold by auction, the house pulled down, the umbrageous groves on the landward side ravaged by the axe, the ground cut up into shabby little roads of semi-detached villas leading to nowhere. The lawn and terrace by the river had been preserved, and were still in the market at a fabulous price.

“And what became of Mr. and Mrs. Cinqmars?” asked Elizabeth, sorry for people who had been kind to her, and surprised to find every one more interested in the fate of the domain than in its late tenants.

Mrs. Chevenix shrugged her shoulders.

“Goodness knows. I have heard that they went to America; that they are living in a cheap quarter of Paris, Mr. Cinqmars speculating on the Bourse; that they are in Italy, Mrs. Cinqmars studying for the operatic stage. There are ever so many different stories afloat about them, but I have never troubled myself to consider which of the reports is most likely to be correct. You know they never were friends of my own choosing. It was Lord Pauly's whim that we should know them.”

“But they were very kind and hospitable, auntie.”

“Ye-es. They had their own views, no doubt, however. Their interest was not in Elizabeth Luttrell, but in the future Lady Pauly. The best thing you can do, Lizzie, is to forget that you ever knew them.”

This was not a very difficult achievement for Elizabeth, whose thoughts rarely roamed beyond the focus of self, except in one solitary instance.

Upon the details of Elizabeth's wedding it is needless to dwell. She was not married before the Derby-day, anxious as Lord Pauly had been to anticipate that great British festival, but early in the flowery month of June, when the roses were just beginning to blow in the poor old Vicaragegarden—as Elizabeth

thought with a sudden pang when she saw the exotics that decked her wedding breakfast. The marriage was, as other marriages, duly recorded in fashionable newspapers, and Mrs. Chevenix took care that etiquette should not be outraged by the neglect of the minutest detail, by so much as a quarter of an inch on the wrong side in the depth of the bride's Honiton flounces, or a hackneyed dish among the *entrées* at the breakfast.

So these two were made one, and went off together in the conventional carriage-and-four from Eaton-place to Paddington Station, en route for the Malvern Hills, where they were to moon away a fortnight as best they might, and then come back to town in time for Ascot races.

Now—these chapters being purely retrospective—comes the autumn of the fifth year after Mr. Forde's farewell to Hawleigh.

CHAPTER V.

“ I strive to number o'er what days
 Remembrance can discover,
 Which all that life or earth displays
 Would lure me to live over.
 There rose no day, there roll'd no hour
 Of pleasure unembitter'd ;
 And not a trapping deck'd my power
 That gall'd not while it glitter'd.”

THEY were at Slogh-na-Dyack, in Argyleshire, where, at the foot of a heather-clothed mountain that ran up almost perpendicularly to meet the skies. Lord Paulyn had bought for himself a palatial abode, in that Norman-Gothic style which pervades the mansions of the North—a massive pile of buildings flanked by sugar-loaf towers, with one tall turret dominating the rest, as a look-out for the lord of the castle when it was his fancy to sweep the waters with his falcon gaze. It is almost impossible to imagine a more delicious habitation, sheltered front and rear by those lofty hills, the blue waters of the Kyles of Bute lapping against its garden terrace; a climate equal to Torquay; long ranges of orchard houses where peaches and nectarines ripened as under Italian skies; orangeries, vineries, pineries; stabling of unlimited capacity, but chiefly devoted to such sturdy ponies as could best tread those rugged mountain roads; verily, all that the soul of a Solomon himself, in the plenitude of his power and riches, could desire; in the golden autumn, when the grain was still ripening for the late northern harvest, making patches of vivid yellow here and there upon the gentler slopes at the base of the opposite hills, when the purpic

leather, like a Roman Emperor's mantle, was spread over the mountain.

The Norman castle was none of Lord Pauly'n's building. Not in those mediæval fancies of keep and donjon, not in those architectural caprices of machicolated battlements and elaborately-carved mullions, did the heir of all the Paulyns squander that wealth which the dowager had accumulated by unheard-of scrapings and pinchings and self-denials during his long minority. The château of Slogh-na-Dyack had been erected at the cost of a millionaire Glasgow manufacturer, who had made his money out of knife-powder and scouring-paper, and who, when he had built for himself this lordly dwelling-house, had the mortification of discovering that neither his wife nor children would consent to abide there. The heather-clad mountain, the blue water, the wide bosom of Loch Fyne stretching away in the distance, the wild denizens of that mountain region, the flutter of whose strong wings gladdened the heart of the sportsman, might be all very well; and to three or four weeks at Rothesay or Colintrave in the bathing season the lady and her daughters had no objection; but a fixed residence, six months out of the twelve, on that lonely shore, they steadfastly refused to endure. So the scouring-paper and knife-powder manufacturer, to whom the cost of a Norman castle more or less was a mere bagatelle, gave his agent orders to dispose of the château at the earliest opportunity, and resigned himself to the sacrifice involved in such a sale. The house and its appurtenances had cost him five-and-twenty thousand, the land five. He sold the whole to Lord Pauly'n—after prolonged haggling, in which at last the Glasgow manufacturer showed himself unequal to the English nobleman—for seventeen thousand, and went home, after signing the contract, to his mansion by the West Park, rejoiced to be rid of his useless toy.

Lord Pauly'n had been chiefly attracted to the place by its peculiar capacities for the abode of a yachting man. Slogh-na-Dyack stood on the edge of a bay, where there was anchorage for half-a-dozen yachts of the largest calibre; while on one side of the mansion there was a narrow inlet to a secondary harbour, a bay within a bay, a little basin hollowed out of the hills, where, when tempests were raging, the frailest bark might ride secure, so perfect was the shelter, so lofty the natural screen that fenced it from the winds. It was a harbour for fairies, a calm lakelet in which, on moonlit nights, one would have scarcely been surprised to find TITania and her company sporting with the silvern spray.

Hither Reginald Pauly'n brought his wife after they had been married about two years and a half. It was her first visit, except for a flying glimpse of those mountain slopes from her husband's yacht, to Scotland—*his* land, her first lover's native land.

The thought thrilled her even now, when the remembrance of the days in which he had loved her was like the memory of a dream.

She had been married two years and a half; years in which she had drained the cup of worldly pleasure, and of womanly sorrow also, to the very lees. She had run riot in fashionable extravagances; given some of the most popular parties in London, in the house with the many balconies; won for herself the brilliant distinction that attends social success; queened it over all compeers by the insolence of her beauty, the dash and sparkle of her manner. For a little while—so long as the glamour lasted, and selfishness was subjugated by the intoxication of novelty—she had ruled her husband; then had come disputes, in which she had been for the chief part triumphant; then later disputes, in which his dogged strength of will had conquered; then coldness, severance, estrangement, each tugging at the chain, eager to go his or her own way. But before the world—that world for which Elizabeth had chosen to live—Lord and Lady Paulyne appeared still a very happy young couple, a delightful example of that most delightful fact in natural history—a love match.

Their quarrels at the worst, and they had been exceedingly bitter, had hardly been about the most serious things upon which men and women could disagree. Money matters, my lady's extravagance, had been the chief disturbing influence. The breast of neither husband nor wife had been troubled with the pangs of jealousy. Elizabeth's conduct as a matron was irreproachable. In the very vortex of fashionable frivolity no transient breath of suspicion had ever tarnished the brightness of her name. The Viscount, in his unquestionable liberty, had ample room and verge enough for any sin against his marriage vow were he inclined to be a sinner, but as yet Elizabeth had never stooped to suspect. Their estrangement therefore had not its root in those soul-consuming jealousies which sunder some unions. Their disputes were of a more sordid nature, the wranglings of two worldly-minded beings bent on their own selfish pleasures.

Eighteen months after their marriage there came the one real affliction of Elizabeth's womanhood. A son had been born to her, fair as the first offspring of youth and beauty, a noble soul—or so it seemed to her—looking out of those clear childish eyes, a child who had the inspired seraphic look of the holy Babe in a picture by Raffaele, and whose budding nature gave promise of a glorious manhood. He was only a few months old—a few months which made up the one pure and perfect episode in Elizabeth's life—when he was taken away from her, not lost without bitterest struggles, vainest fondest hopes, deepest despair. For a little while after his death the mother's

life also hung in the balance, reason tottered, darkness and horror shut out the light. Dragged through this tangle of mind and body, no one seeming to know very clearly which was out of joint, by physic which seemed to hinder or nature which finally healed, the bereaved mother went back to the world, and tried to strangle grief in the endless coil of pleasure; worked harder than a horse at a mill, and smiled sometimes with a heart that ached to agony; had brief flashes of excitement that seemed like happiness; defied memory; tried to extinguish regret for the tender being she had loved in a more exclusive devotion to self; grew day by day harder and more worldly; lost even the power to compassionate the distress of others, saying to herself in a rebellious spirit, "Is there any sorrow like unto my sorrow?"

To Lord Paulyn the loss of his first-born had been a blow, but not an exceeding heavy one. He had considered the baby a fine little fellow, had caressed him, and tossed him in the air occasionally, at somewhat remote intervals, after the approved fashion of fathers, while smirking nurses marvelled at his lordship's condescension; but he was not broken down by the loss of him. He was a young man, and was not in a desperate hurry for an heir. He had something of that feeling which monarchs have been said to entertain upon the subject of their eldest sons, an inclination to regard the heir-apparent as a *memento mori*.

"By Jove, you know, it isn't the liveliest thing to look forward to," he had said to his friends when arguing upon the subject in the abstract; "a young fellow who'll go and dip himself up to the hilt with a pack of money-lenders, and borrow on post-obits, and play old gooseberry with his father's estate by the time he is twenty-one, and perhaps make a finish by marrying a ballet-girl before he's twenty-two."

It was after a season of surpassing brilliancy, an unbroken round of gaieties, involving the expenditure of so much money that Lord Paulyn groaned and gnashed his teeth when the butler brought in the midsummer bills—a season which had ended in the most serious quarrel Elizabeth and her husband had ever had—that the Viscount brought his wife to this Norman château, not in love but in anger, intending this banishment to the coast of Argyle as a means of bringing the lady to a due sense of her iniquities and a meek submission to his will.

"She'll find it rather difficult to get rid of money *there*," he said to himself, with a sardonic grin, "and I shall take care to fill the house with visitors of my own choosing. There'll be Hilda, too, to look after *my* interest. Yes, I think I shall have the upper hand at Slogh-na-Dyack."

This was another change which the last year had brought to pass. Just at the end of the London season—happening so opportunely after the last ball at Buckingham Palace, as Madame Passementerie, the French milliner, ventured to remark to Lady Paulyn's maid, Gimp—the noble house of Paulyn had been thrown into mourning by the demise of the dowager.

“The noble lady had led a life of extreme seclusion throughout a prolonged widowhood,” said the obituary notice in a fashionable journal; “thus offering the most touching tribute which affection can pay to those it has cherished while on earth, and still fondly mourns when transferred to a higher sphere. Honoured and beloved alike by equals and dependants, she was the centre and source of all good to those who came within her peaceful circle, and she was followed to her last resting-place in the family vault in old Ashcombe church by a train of friends, tenants, and retainers, in which long procession of mourners there was not one who did not lament the loss of a valued friend or an honoured benefactress.” The notice had been written for another patrician widow, but served very well for Lady Paulyn, about whom the editors of newspapers knew little or nothing. She had lived a retired life in the depths of the country, and it was argued that she must of necessity have been benevolent and beloved.

Her death, at the age of seventy-four, had been occasioned by an accident. Sitting up one night in her dressing-room after the household had retired, poring over her agent's last accounts, she had set fire to her cap, an elaborate construction of blonde and ribbons, and had been a good deal burnt about the head and face before Hilda, who slept in an adjacent room, and was promptly awakened by her screams, could rush to her rescue.

Her constitution, vigorous to the last, held out for a little while against grim death, but the shock proved too much for the aged frame, whose sap and muscle had been wasted by the asceticism of economy. The dowager died a few hours after telegrams and express trains had brought her son to her bedside.

As she had only consented to be just barely civil to Elizabeth in their unfrequent intercourse, it was not to be supposed that her departure from this world could be a profound affliction to the reigning Viscountess. She was sorry that her mother-in-law's death should have been a painful one, and perhaps that was all.

“What a pity old people can't die like that person in Mrs. Thrale's *Three Warnings!*” she said afterwards. “Death ought to come quietly to fetch them, without any unnecessary suffering; only a natural surprise and annoyance at being taken

away against one's will, like a child that is fetched home from a nursery ball."

The Viscount contemplated his bereavement chiefly from a business-like point of view.

"I am afraid the Devonshire estates will go to pot now my poor mother's gone," he said dolefully. "I shall never get any one to screw the tenants as she did. That agent fellow, Lawson, was only a cipher. It was the old woman who really did the work, and kept them up to collar. I shall feel the difference now she's gone, poor old soul!"

"I suppose Miss Disney will go into lodgings at Torquay or somewhere, and live upon her private means," said Elizabeth, hardly looking up from the pages of a new novel she was skimming, seated luxuriously in one of the Park-lane balconies, in a very bower of summer blossoms, kept in perennial bloom by the minions of the nurseryman.

This sounded as if she had forgotten a certain conversation in a Devonshire lane one dusky March evening.

"I thought I told you that Hilda had no means," answered the Viscount rather gloomily. "She must come to live with us, of course."

"What, in our house, where we live! Won't that be rather like that strange person who lives over somewhere beyond the Rocky Mountains, and has ever so many wives? I'm sure, if Miss Disney is to live with us, I shall feel myself a number two."

"I wish you wouldn't talk such confounded nonsense, Elizabeth. I suppose you pick up that sort of thing from your friends, who all seem to talk the same jargon, turning up their noses at everybody in creation."

"No, but seriously, can't Miss Disney go on living at Ashcombe? I should think *she* ought to be able to screw the tenants; she must have learnt your poor mother's ways."

"Miss Disney will have a home in my house wherever it is. And I think you ought to be uncommonly glad to get hold of a sensible young woman for a companion. As to my keeping up a separate establishment at Ashcombe for one person's accommodation, that's too preposterous an idea to be entertained for a moment. I shall try and let the place as it stands. You'll be thankful enough for her society, I daresay, at Slogh-na-Dyack."

"I shall have the hills and the sea," said Elizabeth; "they will be better company for me than Miss Disney."

She had seen the château in the course of a yachting expedition in the autumn of last year, when the Viscount, sorely alarmed by the nature of the illness that had followed the loss of her boy, had taken her to roam the blue waters in quest of health and spirits. Health and spirits had come, in some measure—health that was fitful, spirits that were apt to be forced and

spurious, a laugh that had a false ring in it, mirth which sounded sweet enough at one time, but jangled, out of tune, and harsh at another.

So the Viscount wrote to inform Hilda Disney that henceforth her life was to be spent in his household—wrote as briefly and unceremoniously as he might have written to a housemaid—and a week later Miss Disney came to Park-lane, covered with crape, pale, placid, impenetrable. Elizabeth made a great effort over herself in order to receive this new-comer with some faint show of kindness.

“I hope you two mean to get on well together,” said the Viscount, in a little speech that sounded like a command.

“I have no doubt we shall get on remarkably well—if we don’t interfere with each other,” answered Elizabeth. “I believe that is the secret of a harmonious household.”

This was an intimation designed to give Miss Disney a correct idea of her position, a hint which that young lady fully comprehended.

She accepted this position with a certain quiet grace which might have won the heart of any one who had a heart to be won. Elizabeth’s had been given away twice over, once to Malcolm Forde, once to her lost baby. Her small stock of love had been spent on these two. There was no room in her cold weary heart for anything but the ashes of that old fire—certainly no admission for Hilda Disney. But as at this stage of affairs that young person appeared content to be a cipher in her new home, Elizabeth’s languid indifference was not kindled into active dislike. She tolerated the intruder, but at the same time avoided her. This was the position of affairs when Lord Paulyn and a few chosen friends began life and grouse-shooting on the moors around Slogh-na-Dyack.

To Elizabeth’s jaded spirits, worn out by the small excitements of society, the change was at first a welcome one. It was pleasant to find herself mistress of a new domain, which differed widely from her other dominions. Very pleasant to be remote from the region of racehorses and trainers, and trial gallops and experimental exercise of rival two-year olds, in the dewy dawn of autumnal mornings; trials in which, out of mere politeness, she had been obliged sometimes to affect an interest. The novelty of the Norman castle and its surroundings delighted her; nor was she discouraged by its seclusion, or particularly afflicted by the usurpation of the limited number of spare bedrooms by her husband’s sporting cronies, whereby she was deprived of the society of half-a-dozen or so of her own dearest friends, whose reception she had planned as one of the amusements of her Scottish home. The architect whose mediæval mind had designed Slogh-na-Dyack had refused to

fritter away his space upon spare bedrooms, reserving his resources for sugar-loaf turrets, donjons, keeps, gothic balconies, perforated battlements, picture-galleries, a banqueting-hall with a groined roof and a musicians' gallery, a tennis-court, and a cloistered walk under the drawing-room floor.

"You will have to build me a new wing next year, Reginald," Lady Paulyn observed, after expressing her general approval of the château. "It is all very well for us to exist in this benighted manner—for I don't count your shooting people as visitors—for once in a way, but we couldn't possibly exist here another year without a dozen or so more rooms."

"Couldn't we?" said the Viscount, putting on his sullen air, which meant war to the knife. "I chose Slogh-na-Dyack just because it was a little out of the beaten track—not much though, for people go to Oban nowadays just as they used to go to Brighton—and because it has precious little accommodation for your cackling brood of dear friends, no stowage for French waiting-maids and such rubbish—a place where I could feel myself master, and where I might expect you would even take the trouble to devote a little time to my society."

Elizabeth yawned.

"To hear you talk about shooting innocent birds, and of what your horses are going to do next year, and what they ought to have done, but did not do, this year. What a pity there should be such a sameness in domestic conversation!"

"I suppose you would like it better if I could talk about converting the heathen," snarled the Viscount. It was not the first time he had tried to sting his wife with an allusion to the lover who jilted her.

"I should like it better if you had a mind wide enough to be interested in human beings, instead of in dogs and horses," she answered, flashing out at him passionately.

Miss Disney was a mute witness of this little scene, but a mere cipher, whose presence had no restraining influence.

"I shall not think of coming here next year unless there are some more rooms built," Elizabeth remarked decisively, after a little more skirmishing.

"We needn't talk about coming next year until we have quite made up our minds to go away. This place has a famous winter climate," said the Viscount, looking into a huge sealskin case, as if in search of some rare species of cigar, the selection whereof was a work of time. He had a knack of looking down when he said disagreeable things.

"I could not endure the place for more than two months," replied his wife, "and I have made engagements for December."

"That's a pity; for I have invited some fellows here for Christmas."

"I am sure you are at liberty to entertain them—with Miss Disney's assistance. I shall resign all my privileges as *château* at the end of November."

"We'll see about that," said Lord Paulyn darkly. But as he had often uttered this mystic threat, and nothing had ever come of it, except that Elizabeth had always had her own way, in spite of him, the lady was not appalled by his dark speech.

It is not to be supposed that Lady Paulyn was always uncivil to her husband, that she flouted him in season and out of season. She had her intervals of sunshine and sweetness; smiled upon him as she did upon society, and with almost as empty a smile; bewitched him even with something of the old witchery; for, despite his numerous aggravations, he still admired her, and still fondly believed her the handsomest woman in Europe.

This was the state of affairs when Hilda Disney first entered their household; but their domestic life underwent a gradual change after her coming. It was as if by some subtle influence she widened the gulf between them, without design, without malice, but only by her presence. If she had been a statue, she could scarcely have seemed more innocent of evil intention, more unconscious of the harm she did; yet she parted them irrevocably.

She offended the wife by no demonstrative affection for the husband; yet, by an unobtrusive concern for his comfort, a perpetual solicitude, an unsleeping care of his well-being, shown in the veriest trifles, but shown almost hourly, she made his wife's indifference a thousand times more obvious than it had ever been before. By her interest in his conversation, by her appreciation of his vapid jokes, her acute perception of the smallest matters in which his prosperity or success was involved, she reminded him of his wife's utter apathy about all these things. One of the grievances of his married life was the fact that he had never been able to interest Elizabeth in the details of his racing stud, those narrow chances and hairbreadth failures which make or mar the fortunes of the year. She liked Epsom and Ascot and Newmarket and Goodwood and Doncaster and York well enough as scenes of gaiety and excitement—festivals in which her beauty made her a kind of queen. She could even admire a winning horse as a grand and famous creature; but she had not a mathematical brain, and could not by any means comprehend that intricate process of calculation by which great results are sometimes arrived at in the racing world, and by which the Napoleons of the turf accumulate their colossal fortunes.

In this she was the very reverse of Hilda, whose arithmetical powers had been trained to extreme acuteness in the service of the late dowager, and who, without any natural fondness

for horses, could enter into all the complications of a betting-book; could even, on some rare occasion, give a wrinkle to the Viscount himself, as that gentleman remarked with supreme astonishment.

“Upon my word, you know, Hilda, you’re the downiest bird—I beg your pardon, the cleverest woman I ever met with. If my wife had only your brains——”

“With her own beauty! That would be too much. Not that my brains are anything to boast of, but I have been trained in a rather severe school.”

“I should think you have indeed; my mother was an out-and-outer. I don’t believe there was ever such a screw, you know, before her time, or ever will be after it. There ought to be something of the kind put up in Ashcombe church, by Jove. It would look well in Latin—that quotation of Burke’s, for instance: *Magnum vectigal est parsimonia*. But you have got a wider way of looking at this than my mother. And as for looks, if you’re not as handsome as Elizabeth, who really is the finest woman in Europe, you’ve no reason to complain of your share of good looks; and you know there was a day when I used to say a good deal more than that.”

A faint colour came into Hilda’s fair face.

“We were children then,” she said.

“O, hang it; I was at Oxford, and in the University eight. There wasn’t much of the child about me, Hilda.”

“Except in a childish want of judgment—not knowing your own mind, in short,” she answered, looking down at a flimsy printed catalogue of racehorses which they had been studying together when this conversation began.

“O, well, we settled all that ever so long ago. Let bygones be bygones, Hilda.”

“Was it I who recalled the past?”

“I’m sure it wasn’t I,” answered Lord Paulyn hastily, “and I don’t want to recall it. I don’t forget what a temper you had in those days, Hilda. Children indeed! You were a child who knew how to call a fellow over the coals like anything. I’ve a very keen recollection of some of our shindies. However, all that was so long ago, and I’m an old married man now; so I thought we should be able to get on very well together. And I must say you’re wonderfully improved; ten years’ more grinding in my mother’s mill has made a difference, hasn’t it?”

“I hope I have conquered my evil tempers, and everything else that was foolish in me,” said Hilda meekly.

That little demure speech of Miss Disney’s set the Viscount thinking. Ten years ago there had been certain love-passages between himself and his cousin—a pretty little pastoral flirtation, which filled the intervals of his field sports pleasantly

enough—but which, begun for the amusement of long dull autumnal afternoons in a dreary old house, ended somewhat seriously. The girl had been serious from the beginning. Her cousin, Reginald, was the only man whose society had ever brightened the dismalities of her joyless home. He was young, good-looking, energetic, and possessed that superfluity of physical strength which gives a kind of dash and swagger to a man's manner of doing things—a dash and swagger that, in the eyes of inexperienced girlhood, pass for courage and chivalry. He rode well, shot superbly, talked the last Oxonian slang, the novelty of which language was agreeable after the dowager's dull grumblings and perpetual prosing upon small worries. In a word, he was the only thing Hilda Disney had to love, and she loved him, hiding more intensity than he could have suspected under her placid demeanour.

For a short time—a long vacation and a Christmas visit—he reciprocated her passion. The fair still face seemed to him the perfection of patrician beauty—a wonderful relief after certain sirens of the barmaid order with whose lighter converse he was wont to soften the asperities of classic learning. He had vague thoughts of a future in which Hilda should be his wife; and was severely rated by his widowed parent upon the folly of his course. Marry Hilda, indeed, without a sixpence, or a rag to her back that was not supplied by charity. He had better pick up a beggar girl in the street at once, and then his next-of-kin would, at least, have the satisfaction of taking out a statute of lunacy on his behalf.

But the passion passed—as passions were apt to pass with the Viscount. A barmaid flirtation—more in earnest than previous barmaid flirtations—blotted out the milder charms of his cousin. When he came to Ashcombe in the next long vacation, he thought her looking pale and faded. Nor was her temper improved. She perceived his indifference, and taxed him with it. Then came bitter little speeches, sudden bursts of tears, angry rushes from the room, bangings of doors, and all the varieties of squabbling that compose lovers' quarrels; until at last, with a praiseworthy candour, the Viscount confessed that he had for some time past ceased to care for his cousin, except in the most cousinly way.

“If ever you're in want of a friend, you know, Hilda, you can come to me; and wherever I live, by and by, when my mother goes off the hooks—my house will be your home, if you haven't one of your own.”

She acknowledged this offer with some dignity, but with a very white face and lips that quivered faintly in spite of her firmness, and expressed the hope that she might never intrude upon his hospitality.

“Well, I hope you’ll make a good match, Hilda,” he said, rather awkwardly, “and then, of course, you’ll be independent of me and mine; but I shall never forget you, and how fond I was of you, and all that. O, by the way, you may as well give me back the letters I wrote you from Oxford. One never knows when that sort of rubbish may fall into dangerous hands, and make no end of mischief. Hunt ’em all up, will you, Hilda? and we’ll amuse ourselves with a bonfire this wet morning.”

Hilda informed him, after a few moments’ hesitation, that she had made the bonfire already.

“I burnt them one by one as they came, after I had read them once or twice,” she said. “It was safer on account of my aunt. The surest way of preventing them from falling into dangerous hands.”

“What a deep card you are!—as deep as Garrick, upon my word. You’re quite sure you burnt them?”

“Quite sure. Don’t be alarmed, Reginald. There will be no action for breach of promise.”

“O, it isn’t that, you know. No girl with a hap’orth of self-respect would go in for that sort of thing; much less such a girl as you. Only old letters are the deuce and all for creating trouble in a man’s life. I’m glad you burnt ’em.”

Never since these juvenile love-passages, which left a somewhat unpleasant flavour in Lord Paulyn’s mouth—a flavour of remorse, perhaps—had he liked Hilda so well as he liked her now, in their quiet life at Slogh-na-Dyack. She was of so much use to him—so able a counsellor, so ready a confidante. He gave her a pile of his house-steward’s bills to look over, and she charmed him at once by suggesting that he should, in future, pay ready money for all household supplies—or make weekly payments, to be ranked as ready money—and claim a discount of ten per cent on all such accounts.

“No doubt the tradesmen pay your people five per cent already,” she said. “They would willingly pay you ten for the sake of getting ready money. Your discounts ought to pay the wages of half your household, instead of going into the servants’ pockets.”

By such brilliant flashes of genius did Hilda charm her cousin. He groaned aloud as he compared this skilled economist with his wife, whose extravagances still rankled in his mind, and whose refusal of a settled allowance he had not ceased to consider an artful stroke of business, whereby she had reserved to herself the right of unlimited expenditure.

“If ever I let her leave Slogh-na-Dyack, I shall restrict her to an allowance of five hundred a year,” he said to himself. But there were times when the spirit of anger against his wife burnt so fiercely within him, that he had serious thoughts of

making her spend the rest of her life in Argyleshire, with only such change of scene as his yacht might afford her—a cruise in the Mediterranean now and then, or a ran to Madeira or St. Michael's.

“It'll suit me well enough for six months of the year. I can always run up from Glasgow when there are any races on,” reflected Lord Paulyn, who, after the manner of racing men, thought nothing of spending his night in railway carriages, speeding at express rate over the face of the country.

Elizabeth perceived the harmony that reigned between her husband and his cousin; perceived that he no longer troubled himself with the futile endeavour to impart his perplexities to her non-mathematical brain. She saw all this, and without being absolutely jealous—was jealousy possible where love was absent?—was keenly stung by this preference. She had been accustomed to think of her husband as her slave—a refractory slave sometimes—but never able to put off his bondage; a creature to be made glad by her smile; to be subdued into submission by her frown. She had felt the sense of her power over him all the more keenly because in the society of other women he was, for the most part, morose or indifferent—wrapped up in his own thoughts about his own amusements or speculations—slow to comply with the exigencies of polite life; a man who, if he had not been the rich Lord Paulyn, might have been called a boor. To her own chosen friends he had been habitually uncivil—beauty, except her own, seemed to have no charm for him; wit and vivacity only bored him. All the graces of feminine costume were a dead letter.

“I think she wore cherry colour, with blue sleeves,” he answered once, when his wife questioned him upon a fashionable toilette; “or was it Lord Zetland's colours, white and red? Upon my soul I don't know which.”

She beheld him now for the first time interested in the society of another woman, and beheld with wonder that woman's capacity for understanding him and sympathising with him. Mortified by this discovery, she avenged herself at first by reducing the Viscount's sporting friends to a state of abject slavery; but speedily wearying of this shallow amusement, grew sullen, shut herself up in her own rooms—the best in the house, occupying the whole front of the second story, and sweeping the waters of the strait, and the purple hills on the opposite side—read, sketched, and brooded; or roamed alone upon the mountain-side, and thought of her dead-and-gone youth, and the lover she had loved and lost. His image haunted her in this lonely region—in this tranquil, empty life—more than it had ever haunted her since she knelt down upon her bridal eve and prayed to God for strength to forget him. She was in his

native country for the first time in her life, and that she should think of him seemed only a natural association of ideas. Not was this all; she felt herself injured by her husband's evident liking for his cousin's society, and so opened the doors of her heart to fatal memories; lived again as in a dream, her brief summertide of joy and sorrow; gave up her thoughts to sad musings upon that foolish past. Sometimes she varied the burden of that sorrow by thinking of her dead baby—alas! how often in her dreams had she felt those little arms clasped about her neck, those sweet soft breathings on her cheek, and red lips like opening flowers pressed warm against her own! She thought of what that romantic home might have been to her, still blessed with her boy; fancied the sunny noontide on the grassy slope above the blue water, or the terrace sheltered from northern winds by a grove of pinasters; or in the flower-garden behind the house, a fertile hollow at the foot of the mountain; wandering on the mountain top with her darling in her arms, the summer air noisy with loud humming of bees, and the sweet west wind blowing round them. Not for her these tender pleasures, only loneliness and regret; the bitter memory of things that had once been sweet.

Pride stifled all expression of anger at her husband's defection. Not by word or look did she betray her displeasure at the position which Hilda Disney was fast assuming in the household. On the contrary, she suffered the reins to slip from her hands as if weary of the burden of government. Her old languor and dislike of exertion, except in pursuit of some novel pleasure, returned to her. Life at Slogh-na-Dyack was very much like life at Hawleigh Vicarage; there was only a difference of detail. Trained serving-men in place of a parlour-maid; a certain state and splendour in all the machinery of the household. The evenings in the long drawing-room, with its mediæval oak furniture, modern French tapestries, and Brummagem armoury, all made on purpose for the château at the cost of the Glasgow knife-powder maker, were just as dull as the evenings in the old days, when she had yawned over a novel in the society of her three sisters. Lord Pauly and his guests congregated in the smoking-room, or paced the wide stone hall, a spacious vaulted chamber always odorous with tobacco, or strolled on the terrace, staring at the moonlit water, and talking of their day's work among the birds. They were men who walked thirty miles or so between breakfast and dinner, and who, after devoting a couple of hours to their evening gorge, retired within themselves like boa-constrictors, and were in no manner dependent upon feminine society. So when Elizabeth, weary of their vapid compliments, and despising the petty triumph afforded by the subjugation of such small deer, ceased to be particularly civil to them, they

deserted the drawing-room almost entirely, and solaced themselves with smoke and billiards, or placid slumbers, stretched at ease upon morocco-covered divans, lulled by the ripple of the wavelets that lapped against the beach.

Once in ten days or so Lord Paulyn sped southward for a day's racing, generally accompanied by a chosen friend, and returned, depressed or elated as the case might be, to talk over all his proceedings—his triumphs or his failures—with his cousin Hilda. These confabulations, which took place openly enough in some snug corner of the drawing-room, wounded Elizabeth to the quick. She began to think that all those vapid men saw the slight thus put upon her, and discussed it in their smoking-room conclaves. She began to fancy that her very servants were losing some touch of their old reverence; that her maid had a compassionate air.

“Shall I live to be pitied?” she asked herself, remembering that she had sold herself to the bondage of a loveless marriage for the sake of being envied.

One day she determined upon sending for Blanche, in order to bring some new force to bear upon Miss Disney; but upon the next day altered her mind. She would not endure that her sister—even her best-loved, most-trusted sister—should see that there was an influence in her husband's house stronger than her own.

“Blanche would go on so,” she said to herself, “and I feel too weak and tired to bear fuss of any kind. And after all what does it matter if my husband has found somebody to be interested in his racing talk? It never interested me; only I believe that Hilda's sympathy is all put on. No woman could be interested in handicapping and Chester Cups for ever and ever.

So Lady Paulyn made no struggle to maintain her authority. She allowed Hilda to drive her pony-carriage, and make friends with the few families scattered in pretty white villas here and there upon the coast. She left to Hilda the trouble of dispensing tea and coffee at the eight-o'clock breakfast; the gentlemen were early at Slogh-na-Dyack, and over the hills and far away before ten. She suffered Hilda to receive the sportsmen when they came straggling up from the boat, with the dogs at their heels, and she rarely appeared herself in the public rooms of the château till a quarter of an hour before the eight-o'clock dinner. She had the long days to herself, and roamed alone where she would, making her companions of the hills and the blue sea. Sometimes, when she looked from the hill-tops towards the Mull of Cantyre, her soul yearned to escape by that rock-bound point, to sail away to the South-Sea isles, and toil, for God's sake, by the side of the man she loved. O, how easy, how sweet, how smooth it seemed to her now, that better life which

she had cast away! "How easy it would have been for me to do good for his sake," she said; "to be schooled by him, to become anything that he could make me—a saint almost—by his pure influence!"

Then from that distant seaward opening, from that dream-like gaze towards an unknown world far away, her tired eyes would sink downward to the towers and pinnacles of Slogh-na-Dyack, like a fairy palace dimly seen through the misty atmosphere. Was it not verily the fairy palace of her dreams, symbol of the Cinderella's triumph she had fancied for herself in her childish visions?

"I wonder whether Cinderella was happy," she said to herself, "or if she ever wished herself back among the cinders, and hated her fairy godmother for having made her a princess. She found rich husbands for her sisters at any rate, and that is more than I have done. I have been *no* use in the world to any one but myself."

On quiet Sundays, and the Sabbath at Slogh-na-Dyack was very quiet, the sound of the bells ringing through the soft summer air brought back the thought of Hawleigh and the grave old church, its massive clustered columns and lofty arches, shadowy aisles sonorous with the fresh young voices of the choir, and sometimes with *his* voice alone, reading the lessons of the day, with a tender earnestness that gave familiar words a new meaning. Here in the little Episcopalian chapel the sacred rites were sorely stunted; no white-robed choristers trooping in through the vestry-door, no decorated altar-cloths or floral festivals, but the same dull round from year's end to year's end; a harmonium grumbling an accompaniment of common chords to the dullest selection of hymns extant, and one elderly incumbent prosing his feeble little sermons, and doing his best to maintain the dignity of his Church single-handed.

Elizabeth and Miss Disney were regular in their attendance at this small temple, which was an unpretentious edifice of corrugated iron, like a gigantic Dutch oven, until at last, after about half-a-dozen Sundays, Lady Paulyn wearied of the elderly incumbent.

"There's another Episcopalian chapel at Dunallen," she said; "a real stone pretty little gothic building, which can hardly be so intolerably hot as this oven. I shall take the pony-carriage this afternoon and go over there."

She did not invite Miss Disney to join her in this expedition; so that young lady, who made a point of holding herself aloof from all intercourse to which she was not specially invited, and who had certainly received no inducement to abandon this reserve, went her own ways to the little iron church in the island, while Lady Paulyn drove to Dunallen. It was a calm sunless

afternoon, with an atmosphere that seems made on purpose for Sundays—a day on which the birds forget to sing, and the rabbits lie asleep in their holes. The Kyles of Bute looked smooth as an Italian lake, but there was no Italian sky above them, only the uniform gray of Scottish heavens, unbroken save by the white mist-wreaths on the hill-tops.

The Viscount and his friends, after having spent all the lawful days of the week in perambulating the moors, lunching on the mountain-top upon savoury stews cooked in a travelling kitchener, washed down with Glenlivet, were not sorry for the day of rest, which they devoted to lying full-length on the divans in the smoking-room, or sauntering in the garden and hot-houses, talking Newmarket and Tattersall's. Going to church was not among their accomplishments.

Dunallen was a hamlet among the hills, round which sundry white-stone villas had scattered themselves, a hamlet on a winding hill-side road looking downward across an undulating tract of fertile meadow and cornfield to the blue bosom of the loch. Lady Paulyn had marked the spot, and the little gothic Episcopal church, lately erected at the cost of a landowner in the neighbourhood, in the course of her lonely rambles. The village was within three miles of Slogh-na-Dyack, and one of her favourite walks was in the moorland above it.

The bells were ringing with a sweet solemn sound in the still air, as the little carriage drove round the curve of the hill, and up to the pretty gothic doorway of Dunallen chapel. The Presbyterian church stood a few paces off, a gaunt edifice of fifty years ago, grim and uncompromising; as who should say, Here you will get only plain substantial fare, and no foreign kickshaws; something to bite at, in the way of theology. Behind the Episcopal chapel, with its dainty, dandified air, there rose a little grove of firs upon the green slope of the hill, crowning the gothic pinnacles with their dark verdure, and in front of the fir-grove, a few yards from the chapel, stood a tiny manse, a miniature Tudor villa, in which a young newly-wedded incumbent might have found life very picturesque and pleasant, but in which there would have hardly been breathing room for a pastor with a large family.

Lady Paulyn was one of the first to enter the small church, and was speedily conducted to a comfortable seat by an obsequious pew-opener, who had marked the arrival of the carriage. The light within was softened by painted windows from Munich; the open seats were of dark oak; the small temple had the look of a labour of love.

The service was conducted in the usual unornamental style; a little stout man with sandy whiskers read prayers at a hand gallop to a sparse congregation, who afterwards joined

their vinegar voices in a shrill hymn, not one of those Hymns Ancient and Modern which Elizabeth loved so well, but a dry-as-dust composition, which would never have given wings to any heavenward-soaring soul. Elizabeth thought these ministrations but a small improvement on the services of the corrugated iron chapel at Slogh-na-Dyack. She had fallen into a drowsy absent-minded condition by the time the shrill singing was finished, and did not take the trouble to look up to see the little stout man trot up the pulpit-stairs.

She sat looking down at the loosely-clasped hands in her lap, when another voice, without any preliminary prayer, gave out the text; and lifting her eyes with a wild stare, in which rapture and surprise were strangely blended, saw a tall figure in a surplice in the place where the little man might have stood—the figure of Malcolm Forde.

No cry broke from her lips, though her heart beat as it had never beaten before. She sat dumbly looking at him, white as death, with fixed dilated eyes. The dead newly risen from the grave could not have moved her more deeply. Great Heaven, how she loved him! It seemed to her as if in that moment only she realised the overwhelming force of her love. A new world, a new life, were contained in his presence. To see him there, only to see and hear him—whatsoever gulf yawned between them—was new life to her; renovated youth, hope, joy, enthusiasm, aspiration for higher things.

“O God, if I can only hear his voice every Sunday,” she thought, “I will worship him, and live for him, and be good and pure for his sake, and never strive to lessen the distance that divides us. What more joy can I desire than to know that he lives, and is well and happy, and breathes the same air I breathe, and looks out across the same sea, and is near me unawares. O, thank God for the chance that brought me to Slogh-na-Dyack! Thank God for my bonnie Scottis’ home!”

His sermon to-day was like his old sermons, full of life and fire and quiet force and supreme tenderness, the sermon of a man speaking to a cherished flock out of a heart overflowing with love. Yet she fancied that his tones had lost something in mere physical power; that deep-toned voice was weaker than of old. Once he stopped, exhausted, at the close of a sentence with an appearance of fatigue that she had never seen in him at Hawleigh, and his face looked very pale in the cold light from a northern window.

The thought of this change touched her heart with a sudden sense of fear. That spiritual countenance turned to the northern light, those deep hollow eyes, all the lines of the face more sharply chiselled than of old, something that was not

age, but rather an indication of hard wear and tear that stood in the place of age—these were the tokens of his late labours, the seal that his mission had set upon him.

“If he should die,” she said to herself, appalled; “while I, who seem made of some hard common clay, too tough to be broken by sorrow, go on living.”

The sermon was not a long one. There was no hymn afterwards, only the clink-clink of shillings and sixpences into the bowl, which a grim-looking Scotchman carried round the little church. The service altogether had been of the briefest; and Donald the groom, who perhaps took his measure from a familiarity with the Presbyterian office, had not arrived with the pony-carriage when Lady Paulyn came out of the church.

She looked round her with something like terror at finding herself standing almost alone by the church-door, knowing that Malcolm Forde was so near; might come through that open door at any moment, and meet her face to face, for the first time since he had cast her from his heart with cruel deliberate repudiation.

She thought of the morning on which she had gone to his lodgings in quest of him; gone with a determination to humble herself, to ask for his forgiveness and his blessing before he left her for ever. And behold, that bitter parting, that loss of something which had seemed to her the very life of her life, had not been for ever. The world which seemed so wide was narrow enough to bring these two face to face again.

“If I had seen him that morning, and he had forgiven me, I should never have married Lord Paulyn,” she said to herself. “If he had left me only a few words of kindness or forgiveness, I would have been true to his memory all my life; but his coldness drove me mad. I had no memory of the past to console me; I had no hope in the future to sustain me.”

Still no sign of Donald and the ponies. The scanty congregation had dispersed; the mountain road was empty. She stood watching the curve round which the ponies must in due time appear, half dreading, half hoping that Malcolm Forde might come that way.

She had been waiting about ten minutes or a quarter of an hour—a period which seemed almost interminable—when she heard the shutting of a distant door, and the sound of footsteps approaching her. She had gone a little way along the road, in the opposite direction to the vicarage. The incumbent and his friend would be likely to return thither when the service was ended. She had not flung herself purposely in the path of her old lover.

She heard the footsteps drawing nearer, and the voices of two men conversing. One, the thin reedy pipe of the incumbent;

the other that deep graver organ, whose every tone she knew so well.

They had gone a little way past her, when the short stout gentleman, who had been apprised by the appearance of a stray sovereign in the alms-basin that some important member of his flock, or perchance some illustrious stranger, had been among the congregation, turned himself about to behold her, pirouetting in an airy manner, as if admiring the beauties of the landscape.

"Lady Paulyn, I declare," he murmured to his companion, after a brief survey

His companion stared at him for a moment with a look of sheer amazement, and stopped short.

"What Lady Paulyn? Do you mean an old woman, Lord Paulyn's mother?"

"No, a young woman, and a very handsome one. The Dowager Lady Paulyn died a few months ago."

They were walking on again. Malcolm Forde had not looked backward. Was it verily Elizabeth, the woman he had loved, the woman whose image had followed him in his farthest wanderings, the shadowy face looking into his, the spirit voice speaking with him, in spite of his prayer for forgetfulness, in spite of his manhood and his reason? In dreams, walking and sleeping, she had been with him. Thoughts of her had intruded themselves upon his most solemn meditations; never, even at his best, had he been free from those olden fetters, the fatal bondage of earthly love.

And yet he had passed her unawares, upon that mountain road, and would not for all the world go back to speak to her. A few yards farther on they met the pony-carriage, the small cream-coloured ponies with bells upon their harness, the little shell-shaped carriage with its bearskin and scarlet rug.

Mr. Forde smiled his bitterest smile at the sight of that dainty equipage. Was it not for pomps and vanities such as these she had sold herself?

"How does she happen to be here?" he asked his companion.

"You know her!" exclaimed Mr. Mackenzie, the incumbent, turning upon him sharply.

"Yes, I know her."

"But won't you speak to her? Let us go back. It must seem so rude to have passed her like that. And you can introduce me. I should really have liked to call on her when she first came to Slogh-na-Dyack, but she would naturally attend the Episcopalian church down there, I thought, and I hate the idea of seeming intrusive. Let us go back and speak to her before she drives off."

"No, Mackenzie. My acquaintance with her began and ended a long time ago. I will not renew it. You must get some one else to present you, or call upon her and present yourself."

"Was she Lady Paulyn when you knew her?"

"No."

"Quite a nobody, I've been told, before her marriage?" inquisitively.

"I don't know your exact definition of a nobody. Her father was my vicar—a man of old family; and she was one of the loveliest girls, or I will say the loveliest, I ever saw."

"No doubt—no doubt; she's a splendid woman now. But it was a great match for a country clergyman's daughter. I wish my daughters may marry half as well when they grow up. Their complexions at present have a tendency to run to freckles; but I daresay they'll grow out of that."

The pony-carriage flashed rapidly by at this moment; Elizabeth driving, and looking neither to the right nor left.

"How do they come to be here?" asked Malcolm.

"What, didn't I tell you yesterday, when I took you for that long round? No, by the bye, we did not go near Slogh-na-Dyack. Lord Paulyn has lately bought a place on the coast here; a charming place, which he got a dead bargain. We'll go over and call to-morrow, if you like."

"Haven't I told you that I don't want to renew my acquaintance with Lady Paulyn?"

"That sounds so ungracious; your old vicar's daughter too. However, I suppose you have your own reasons."

"I have. It's best to tell you the plain truth, perhaps; only mind it goes no farther, not even to Mrs. Mackenzie. Miss Luttrell and I were engaged to be married, and she flung me over for Lord Paulyn. That's the whole story. It's a thing of the remote past; a folly on both sides, no doubt; since she was created by nature to adorn the position she now occupies, and I had other hopes which I was willing to abandon for her sake. Do not think that I cherish any ill-feeling against her; only—only it might pain us both to meet."

Mr. Mackenzie held his peace after this, and the two men made a circuit of the hill-side, and returned to the manse to dine on a cold roast of beef, as Mrs. Mackenzie called it, and a salad, in clerical fashion; content to consume their viands cold on the day of rest. But Mr. Mackenzie had a budget of news for his wife that night when they retired to their own chamber, and dutifully poured into her listening ear the story of Malcolm Ferde's love-affair.

CHAPTER VI.

“ Quel mortel ne sait pas, dans le sein des orages,
 Où reposer sa tête, à l’abri des naufrages ?
 Et moi, jouet des flots, seul avec mes douleurs,
 Aucun navire ami ne vient frapper ma vue,
 Aucun, sur cette mer où ma barque est perdue,
 Ne porte mes couleurs.”

THREE months before the Sunday on which Elizabeth went to the little Episcopal church among the hills, Malcolm Forde had come home, a very shadow of his former self, to renew the strength that he had spent in the fatiguing service of his mission. Not disheartened or disgusted with his work did he journey homeward, only intent upon returning to that beloved labour in a little while, with a frame made vigorous by the cool breezes of this native land, and mental powers that should have gained new force from a brief season of rest. Infinitely had God blest his endeavours in that distant world, and infinite were his hopes of future achievement. He had not mistaken his mission upon this earth; the work prospered under his hand. He was of that stamp of men who are by nature formed to be leaders of their fellow-men; created to convince, to subjugate, to rule the weaker clay which makes the mass of humanity.

He came home to Scotland in no manner depressed, though he felt that his health was shaken; that he had laboured just a little longer than prudential considerations would have warranted; not cast down, although he fancied sometimes, as the good ship sailed homewards, that he should never again cross those blue waters, never finish the work so well begun.

“ If not I, some other one,” he said to himself, in tranquil resignation. “ I cannot believe that labourers will be wanted for so fair a vineyard. Let me be content if I have been suffered to see the beginning of that glorious end which I know must come in God’s good time, before that wonderful day when the dead shall arise from their graves, and Alice Fraser and I shall see each other again.”

He thought of his first love, whose bridal robe had been her winding-sheet, whose undefiled image rose before him, pure and stainless as an angel’s; and then, with unspeakable bitterness, he thought of that other love, so much more fatally beloved, who had stained her soul with the deep shame of a loveless marriage; who had bartered purity and truth and honour, her life’s liberty, her soul’s independence, for the pomps and vanities of this world.

He went back to Lenorgie. Those he had best loved were sleeping their quiet sleep in the old churchyard among the hills; but there were old friends still left to give him cordial welcome, and he spent the drowsy summer time pleasantly enough in the restful calm of his native place. His small estate was let to strangers, even the house in which he was born; but he found a comfortable lodging in one of the farmhouses on his own land. He had just sufficient society to make life agreeable, and ample leisure for making himself acquainted with the better part of that mass of literature which had been produced during his absence; literature whereof very little had reached him on the other side of the Pacific.

In this manner he spent a couple of months; then finding his health in some manner restored, started on a walking tour from Loch Rannoch to Loch Lomond, resting wherever the fancy seized him; sometimes spending half a week at some quiet out-of-the-way inn, where the herd of summer tourists came not; fishing a little, reading and thinking a great deal, with hope that grew stronger as his physical strength revived: taking the business of pedestrianism altogether quietly, and varying his work according to the humour of the hour. Thus, after the best part of a month spent upon ground which the British tourist scours in a couple of days, he came to Dunallen, where he had an old High-School and college comrade of days gone by, in the person of the Rev. Peter Mackenzie, whose duty he had promised to take upon his own hands for a couple of months, while Mr. Mackenzie and his family enjoyed a holiday in Belgium.

For the first week of Mr. Forde's residence the Rev. Peter was to remain at Dunallen, in order to introduce his friend to his new duties, and make him feel at home in the snug little gothic manse on the hill-side, which was a great deal too small for the Mackenzie olive-branches, but was so arranged, with infinite management on the part of Mrs. Mackenzie, as to contain a permanent spare bedroom. The juvenile Mackenzies inhabited certain dovecot-like chambers in the gables, which might have been rather large for a pigeon, but were a good deal too small for a child, except upon the principle that nature will adapt itself to anything in the way of surroundings. The little Mackenzies might have carried their bedrooms on their back like snails without being very heavily burdened; but they thrived and flourished notwithstanding, and whooped and gambolled like young scions of the Macgregor family in that clear mountain air. In this hospitable abode, where he was almost killed, as Juliet proposed to slay Romeo, with much cherishing, Mr. Forde intended to repose himself for seven or eight weeks, counting the light duties of this small parish as the next thing

to idleness, before returning to his labours at the other end of the world. He hoped to start in November, and thus escape the severities of a British winter, which he felt himself ill prepared to face.

It did indeed seem to Elizabeth, as she drove homeward at a reckless pace that Sunday afternoon, as if life and the world were new again, as if a new force had set the warm blood racing through her veins, as if the very air she breathed had a magical power, and the landscape she looked upon was glorious in the light of a new sun. It was only a little burst of afternoon sunlight, a sudden break in the dull gray sky that beautified the hills, but to her it seemed no common radiance in the skies, no common loveliness in the landscape.

"I would be content to live on just like this for ever," she thought, "if I could hear him preach every Sunday."

Lord Paulyn was enjoying the tardy sunshine before the Gothic porch of Slogh-na-Dyack as his wife drove her ponies up to the chief door of the *câteau*. He was smoking a meditative cigar, but not in solitude. His friend Mr. Lampton, a turf magnate, who had exchanged speculation in Manchester soft goods for the more hazardous operations of the turf, was lounging on an adjacent rustic bench, and his toady-in-chief, Mr. Ferdinand Spink, a gentleman who combined a taste for literature with a genius for billiards, supported himself against an angle of the porch, in a state of supreme exhaustion; while seated in a Glastonbury chair within the shelter of the porch appeared the graceful figure of Hilda Disney. It was altogether a pretty domestic picture—the Viscount planted on the threshold of his mansion, his cousin close at hand, his friend and flatterer on either side, like the supporters in the family arms.

"And how little I am wanted here!" thought Elizabeth, with the old feeling of dislike and suspicion about Hilda.

"Been to church?" asked Lord Paulyn coolly.

"Yes."

"Been doing goody-goody for the lot of us. I'm glad you stick to that sort of thing. It's ballast for the rest of the family."

"I thought you were going to afternoon church," said Elizabeth, turning to Hilda, with a faint suspicion in her look.

"She changed her mind, and stayed at home to talk something over with me," answered the Viscount. "She's worth half-a-dozen stewards. I go to Hilda when I want a wrinkle about the management of my estate. She didn't live the best part of her life with such a jolly old screw as my mother for nothing, I can tell you."

Hilda made no acknowledgment of this dubious compliment.

"Did you like the church at Dunallen?" she asked.

"It is much better than that cast-iron oven."

Elizabeth's face flamed crimson for a moment as she spoke, the old transient flush like the reflection of evening sunlight. Miss Disney marked the vivid colour, and wondered what there could be in a strange church to call for blushes.

"You had a good sermon, I hope, as a reward for your six miles' drive?"

"Yes," answered Elizabeth curtly.

She went into the house, passing her husband without so much as a look.

He had Hilda—Hilda's counsel; Hilda, trained in that sordid school at Ashcombe; Hilda, whose genius was to suggest the saving of money. Her bosom swelled with anger and contempt—anger against both, contempt for both.

"Why did he not marry his cousin, and leave me to my lonely life, leave me to be true to the memory of Malcolm Forde?"

She went up to her own room, the room with the stone balcony looking over the water, the soft blue-gray wavelets which flowed beneath the hills that hid Dunallen. How strange, how sweet, how sad to know he was so near her—he from whom she was parted for ever!

"If I had been constant to him, if I had been content to live my blank miserable life in that wretched little house at Hawleigh, to be dragooned by Gertrude, to creep on my dull way like a snail that has never been outside the walls of some dismal old kitchen-garden,—if I had spent all these years in thinking about him and grieving for the loss of his love, would Heaven have rewarded my patience, and brought him back to me at last? Could I by only a little self-denial, only a few years' patience, have been so blessed at last? No; I will not believe it. To think that would drive me mad."

She sat in the balcony, looking down at the water dreamily, with folded arms resting on the broad stone balustrade, sat living old days over again in a mournful reverie that was not altogether bitter—nay rather perilously sweet, for it brought back the past and the feelings that belonged to the past with a strange reality. Memory opened the gates of a paradise, like that Swedenborgian heaven in which all fairest earthly things have their shadow types. And from the things that had been, her thoughts wandered to the things that might have been—the life she might have lived, had she been true to Malcolm Forde.

"He would have made me a good woman," she thought; "and what have I been without him?"

Her newly-awakened conscience reviewed her past life, a career of frivolity and selfishness unleavened by one charitable thought or noble act. She had lived for herself and to please

herself, and Heaven, as if in anger, had snatched from her the chosen delight of her selfish soul—the child whose influence might have redeemed her useless life, drawn her world-stained soul heavenward.

Dark was the picture of her life to look back upon; darker still her vision of the future: growing estrangement between her husband and herself—her power lessening daily as her beauty decayed; sinister influences at work to divide them, and on her own part an apathy and disgust which made her shrink from any attempt to retain her hold upon his affection.

The booming of the great gong in the hall below reminded her of the common business of life, but hardly awakened her from her day-dream. She hurried to her dressing-room, and suffered herself to be arrayed for the evening, and went down to the drawing-room, where the Viscount and his friends were dispersed upon the ottomans in all manner of attitudes expressive of extreme prostration, feebly pretending to read newspapers, or look at the pictures in magazines, while they sustained muttered discussions about the odds against this horse, or the chances in favour of that. They made a little pretence of picking themselves up, and drawing themselves together, at the entrance of Lady Paulyn. Mr. Spink, the literary gentleman, said something funny, in the *Saturday-Review-and-water* style, about Scotch Sabbaths, but, not receiving the faintest encouragement, returned to the study of *Bell's Life* in a state of collapse.

"I don't know what's the matter with her ladyship this evening," he said afterwards in a burst of confidence, "but she looks as if she were walking in her sleep."

Never was sleep-walker less conscious of her surroundings than Elizabeth that night. She performed the duties of her position mechanically; made very fair answers to the inanities which were addressed to her; smiled a faint cold smile now and then; turned the leaves of the book she pretended to read after dinner; caressed the privileged hound, who stretched his long limbs beside her chair and laid his head among the silken folds of her dress, her favourite companion at times, and fondly devoted to her always.

If the strangeness of her manner were evident to the careless eyes of Mr. Spink—a gentleman who considered the universe a clever contrivance designed as a setting for that jewel Spink—it was much more obvious to the eyes of Hilda Disney, eyes that were sharpened by a jealousy which had never slept since the day when Reginald Paulyn first betrayed his admiration for the Vicar's daughter.

What could have happened within the last few hours to bring about so marked a change? That pale set face, those dreary

awe-stricken eyes, as of one who had held converse with the very dead—what could these denote?

It was not an edifying Sunday evening by any means. The Scottish underlings of the household shivered as the click of the billiard-balls made itself heard in the servants' hall an hour or two after dinner—but how could the Viscount and his friends have lived through the day without billiards?

Elizabeth looked up from her book after a long reverie, to find herself alone with Hilda in the great empty drawing-room; only they two, sitting ever so far apart, like shipwrecked mariners who had been cast ashore on some desert island, and who were not on speaking terms.

“I hope there is nothing the matter, Lady Paulyn?” said Hilda; “you are looking so unlike yourself to-night.”

Elizabeth stared at her for a moment doubtfully, with that almost vacant look which had startled Mr. Spink.

“There is nothing the matter—only—only that I am tired of this place!”

“Already? Why, we’ve been here only a few weeks, and Reginald likes the life so much.”

“That does not oblige me to live here. The place would kill me. I can’t endure the solitude. It makes me think too much. I should go mad if I stayed here.”

This from her, who a few hours ago had thanked God for her Scottish home, had deemed it joy and peace unspeakable to breathe the air that was breathed by Malcolm Forde, to live from the beginning to the end of every week cradled in the hope of seeing him for a little while on Sunday! Yes, she had thought all this, but conscience had awakened with much thinking, and she began to feel that even in this delight, which involved no hope of meeting him face to face, of being forgiven, of hearing him speak her name with something of the old tenderness—even in this there was sin. Danger, in the common sense of the word, there could be none, for was not Malcolm Forde as a rock, against whose calm breast the waves of passion beat in vain? But she knew there was peril to her soul in this vicinity; she knew it by the passionate yearning that filled her heart as she sat by this joyless hearth and thought of the life that might have been had she held by her treasure when it was hers to hold, if she had not, at least for a little while, loved earthly pomps and vanities better than Malcolm Forde.

“I can quite imagine that the exertion of thinking must be a new sensation after your life in Park-lane,” said Miss Disney, with her icy sneer; “but wouldn’t it be as well to encourage the habit? The world will hardly be big enough for you if you always run away from thought. And as you grow older you would find the exercise useful as a way of getting rid of winter

evenings. You remember what Talleyrand said to the young man who couldn't play whist? "What a melancholy old age you are preparing for yourself!"

Elizabeth did not trouble herself to dispute the justice of these observations. She started up from her seat, went over to one of the windows, and flung it open with a sharp decisive action that indicated a mind overwrought. Innumerable stars were shining in the deep dark sky; stars that shone upon him too, she thought, as she looked up at them, with that old, old thought which has thrilled the soul of every man and woman who ever lived, at least once in a lifetime. "Did he recognise me to-day as I drove past him? does he know that I am near? Does he think of me, and pity me, and regret the foolishness that parted us? O, no; to regret would be sin, and he never sins."

Lord Paulyne came into the room while his wife was standing at the open window, listening idly to the slow ripple of the waves, looking idly at the glory of the stars, lost in thought; quite unconscious of anything that happened in the room behind her.

He came in alone, languidly yawning. Miss Disney beckoned him over to her, with a somewhat mysterious air.

"What's the matter, Hilda? How confoundedly solemn you look!"

"I am afraid Lady Paulyne is not well."

"Bosh! She was well enough at dinner. She's been giving herself airs, I suppose. Let her alone, as I do, and she'll come round fast enough."

"No, no, it's not that. But I really think there is something strange about her. Did you not notice something in the expression of her face at dinner?"

"I have left off watching her looks. I know she's a remarkably handsome woman, and she knows it; and has given herself no end of airs on the strength of her good looks. But there are limits to a man's patience, and my stock of that commodity is very nearly exhausted."

"Do you remember what you told me about her illness, after the death of your son?"

The Viscount started, frowned, and looked at his cousin with suppressed anger.

"Do you remember telling me that there was a time when the doctors feared that her mind would never recover from that shock?"

"I told you what the doctors said; but the doctors are hum-bugs. They had a good case, and wanted to make the most of it. I never thought anything of the kind myself. But why the — do you bring this up to-night?"

“Don’t be angry. I am only anxious for your sake as well as hers. There is something very strange in her manner to-night. Of course it may mean nothing, only it is my duty to warn you.”

“O, hang duty!” cried Lord Paulyn impatiently. “I never knew duty urge any one to do anything pleasant. The moment any one mentions duty, I know that I’m in for it.”

He turned upon his heel, paced the room two or three times in an angry mood, and then went out to the balcony, where his wife was standing.

“What are you doing out here star-gazing?” he asked.

The reply came in a softer tone than he was accustomed to hear from Elizabeth’s lips.

“I have been thinking a great deal this evening, Reginald and I am going to ask you a favour. Please don’t call me capricious, or be angry with me for asking it; and if you can possibly grant it, pray do.”

“What the deuce do you want?” he asked ungraciously; “more money, I suppose. You didn’t make a clean breast of it the other day when you gave me your bills—though they were heavy enough, in conscience’ name.”

“It isn’t anything about money. I want you to take me away from this place. I know it is very beautiful. I thought at first I should never be tired of the mountains and the loch, and the sea that lies beyond; but the solitude is killing me. Do let us go away, Reginald, anywhere. I should be happier anywhere than here.”

“I thought as much,” cried Lord Paulyn, with a hard laugh. “I thought there was some plot hatching between you and Hilda. You’d both like to spread your wings, I daresay. You’d like to go to Paris, or Baden-Baden, or Hombourg, or Brighton. Some nice crowded place, where you could spend money like water. No, my dear Elizabeth, when I brought you here, I brought you here to stay. I know Slogh-na-Dyack isn’t lively, but it’s healthy, as the doctors all acknowledge, and for the time being it suits me very well indeed. I came here to diminish my expenses, and I mean to stick here till I’ve filled the hole you dug in my bank balance by your extravagance last season.”

“What!” cried Elizabeth, with ineffable disdain. “You are here for the sake of hoarding your money! You bring me to this out-of-the-way place in order that I may cost you less! Why don’t you send me away altogether? You could save more money that way. I could live upon a hundred a year.”

“Then I am sorry you have never tried the experiment since you have been my wife.”

“Give me back my liberty. Let me go and live somewhere abroad—under a feigned name—alone, my own mistress, free to

think my own thoughts, away from this wretched artificial life, which at its best seems to me like acting a part in a stage play. Let me do that, and I will not ask you for a farthing. I will live on the pittance that belongs to me."

"A very safe offer—even if you meant it, which you don't," answered Lord Paulyn coolly. "No, I married you because I was fool enough to be fond of you, and I'm fool enough to be fond of you still. But there comes an end to the period in which a man rather enjoys being twisted round his wife's little finger. I've been pliable enough. I've let you have your full swing. I half suspected when you refused to have anything settled upon you that you meant to spend my money all the more freely, that you didn't want to be limited to a few hundreds, but meant to make ducks and drakes of thousands. I think I've borne with your extravagance pretty well. From this time forward, however, I mean to pull up, and nurse my income, as my mother nursed the Ashcombe estates for me. The three years of my married life have cost me about six times as much as the same amount of time in my bachelor life; and yet I didn't stint myself of any reasonable indulgence, I can assure you."

"What if I had some special reason for asking you to take me away from this place?" pleaded Elizabeth, without noticing her lord's harangue.

"A woman always has a special reason for wanting her own way," answered Lord Paulyn, with a sneering laugh.

"So be it," she said, raising her drooping head and looking at him with flashing eyes. "I will stay here, then. But remember always that I begged you to take me away, and that you refused me that favour. I will stay here, since you insist upon it, and be happy in my own way."

"Be happy any way you please, so long as you don't worry me with this kind of thing. Come, now, Lizzie, be reasonable, you know. Let us retrench this year, and I'll give you a month or two in Park-lane in the spring. Of course I'm proud of you, and all that sort of thing, and I like to show you off. Only you've contrived to make it so confoundedly expensive."

"What other happiness do you suppose I expected when I married you, except the pleasure of spending money?" she retorted, in her coldest, hardest tone.

"Upon my soul, you're too bad," he cried angrily. "You're not the first woman that has married for money, by a long way, but I should think you're about the first that would look a man in the face and tell him as much without blushing."

And with this reproach he left her, to go back to his friends and smoke a moody cigar in their congenial society.

CHAPTER VII.

“Henceforth I fly not death, nor would prolong
Life much, bent rather how I may be quit
Fairest and easiest of this cumbrous charge,
Which I must keep till my appointed day
Of rendering up, and patiently attend
My dissolution.”

A STRANGE unrest came upon Elizabeth after that Sunday evening, a slow consuming fever of the mind, which in due course had its effect upon the body. The knowledge of Malcolm Forde's vicinity quickened the beating of her heart by day and night. Her sleep was broken by troubled dreams of their meeting; her days were made anxious by the perpetual question, How soon would accident bring them face to face? Or would he come of his own accord to see her? deeming the past buried deeper than the uttermost deep of a fine lady's memory; come to visit her in his sacred office of priest; come to solicit help for his poor, support for this or that benevolent object; come to make a ceremonious professional call upon the lady of Sloghna-Dyack.

The days went by and he did not come, and she told herself that she was glad. Yet she kept count of all visitors with a strange watchfulness, and was fluttered by every sound of the bell at the chief doorway. In her walks and drives the same fatal thought pursued her. At every shadow that fell suddenly upon her pathway, at every approaching footstep, she would look up, trembling lest she should see his tall figure between her and the sunlight. Was it a hope that buoyed her up from day to day, or a fear that troubled her? She scarcely dared to ask herself that question.

Sometimes she stayed indoors all day, seized with a conviction or a presentiment that he would come upon that particular day. He would call upon her, and speak gently of that poor dead past, and assure her of his forgiveness, and give her good counsel for the guidance of her life, and teach her how wisely to tread the dangerous path she had chosen. But that day dragged itself slowly out like all the rest, and he did not come.

So passed a week. On Sunday she ordered her pony-carriage, and went to Dunallen, dreading that Miss Disney might offer to accompany her. But the discreet damsel forbore from any such intrusion. She had made her inquiries during ~~the~~ week,

and knew perfectly who was officiating, in the absence of the incumbent, at Dunallen Church.

"Your preacher at Dunallen must be much better than ours here," she said, standing in the porch as Elizabeth passed by to her pony-carriage, "to tempt you to violate the Scottish Sabbath on two consecutive Sundays."

"I do not think it any more wicked to drive on a Sunday in Scotland than in Devonshire," answered Elizabeth.

"Nor I. I was only thinking of the custom of the country. I know at Ashcombe we had a strong inducement to make a long journey to hear your father's curate—that Mr. Forde, who preached such splendid sermons, and seemed always so terribly in earnest. He went to some outlandish place as a missionary, did he not?"

"Yes."

"What a pity!"

"You need not bewail the fact. He has returned, and is in Scotland. I am going to hear him preach to-day. You can come with me if you like, answered Elizabeth, with a splendid look of defiance, as much as to say, Whatever sins may stain my soul, they shall not be the paltry sins of deceit and suppression.

"No, thanks. I will come some other Sunday," said Miss Disney, curiously discomfited by this unexpected candour. She had taken so much trouble, in a secret way, to ascertain the fact which Elizabeth declared so recklessly; not carelessly or indifferently—for her eyes sparkled, and her lips quivered, and the fever flush that had come and gone so often of late reddened her cheek.

Miss Disney had a spare half-hour before the morning service at the iron chapel, leisure in which to pace slowly to and fro upon the lawn before the Norman-gothic porch, thinking of her cousin and her cousin's wife.

Did she seriously mean to injure either of them, or deliberately plot the ruin of her fortunate rival? No. Nor had she any thought of a day when death might sweep that rival from her path, and she herself be Lady Paulyn. She knew her cousin Reginald too well to hope for that; knew that his brief fancy for her had never been more than an idle man's caprice, and had perished utterly ten years ago; knew that whatever wealth of affection he had to bestow he had squandered upon his wife; knew that there was no farther outcome of feeling to be hoped for from his selfish soul—that whatever love he could feel, whatever self-sacrifice he was capable of, love and sacrifice alike would be wasted upon Elizabeth. She hoped nothing therefore, had no scheme, no dream; only stood by like the Chorus in an old tragedy, or prophesied to herself, like a mute Cassandra.

But she had loved her cousin—had in that distant, forgotten day cherished her golden dream of a happy prosperous existence to be spent by his side—and she could not see him quite as he really was, in all the utter commonness of his nature.

As for her feelings towards Elizabeth—well, it was hardly to be supposed that she should love the woman who had stolen from her that crown of life which she herself had hoped to wear—the woman who, after having robbed her of this treasure, scarcely took the trouble to be civil to her. No, she did not love her cousin's wife.

“What shall I do?” she thought, as she walked to and fro; “I can understand the change in her now—the change which only began last Sunday afternoon. It was the shock of seeing this man again. And she goes to-day to hear him preach, and will contrive to see him perhaps after the service. What ought I to do? Warn my cousin that his wife's old lover is living within a few miles of him, or hold my tongue and let him make the discovery for himself? He is sure to make it, sooner or later, and I do not owe him so much devotion that I need put myself in a false position to save him a little trouble.”

So Miss Disney did nothing, and suffered matters to take their course, contemplating the situation in a cynical spirit, prepared for anything that might happen. It seemed as if the old dowager's gloomy prophecies—and she had prophesied about the various evils to come of her son's marriage with the convulsive fury of a pythoness on her tripod—were in a fair way to be realised.

“It really seems hardly worth while to hate anybody actively,” mused Miss Disney, “for the people one dislikes generally manage to do themselves the worst injury that malice could wish them, sooner or later.”

This Sunday was finer than the last. The autumn sun shone with rare splendour, the little church at Dunallen was full to overflowing. The word had gone forth throughout the neighbourhood that Mr. Mackenzie's substitute was a fine preacher, a man who had done good service as a missionary, too. People had come from a long distance to hear him. Elizabeth felt herself a unit among the crowd. There was no fear that he would be disturbed by the sight of her, she thought; yet she had a seat tolerably near the pulpit—the pew-opener having been eager to do her honour—a seat at the end of an open bench in a diagonal line with the preacher.

How sweet a sound had the familiar prayers when he read them! what a sound of long ago!—full of old sad memories of the churches at Hawleigh, and her dead father's kindly face. They filled her soul with tenderness and remorse. How wicked she had been all her life! how hard, how selfish! She was not

fit to worship among his flock. How many and many a time, Sunday after Sunday, her lips had gabbled those prayers mechanically, while her worldly thoughts were wandering far away from the fane where she knelt! It seemed as if his voice gave a new meaning to the old words; stirred her soul to its profoundest depth, as the pool was troubled at Siloam. Not for a long while—hardly since her girlhood, when she had had fitful moments of religious enthusiasm in the midst of her frivolity—had she felt the same fervour, blended with such deep humility. All the fever and excitement of the last week was lulled to rest in the solemn quiet of that little church among the hills. Again she felt that it was enough for her to be near this saintly teacher, whom she had once loved with but too earthly a passion; enough to be near him, and that she might be good for his sake—a better wife even.

“I will try to do my duty to my husband,” she said to herself, as she sat listening to the sermon, her eyes bent on the open book in her lap, not daring to look up, lest his eyes should meet hers; strangely dreading that first direct look—the stern recognising gaze of those dark eyes of his—after this gap of time.

His sermon was upon duty. A straight and simple discourse, adorned by no florid eloquence, but made touching by many a tender allusion to that lovely life which is the type and pattern of all human excellence. He spoke of the duties which belong to every relation of life; of children and of parents, of husbands and of wives. It was a sermon after the apostolic model; friendly counsel to his new friends, here among remote Scottish hills, far away from the falsehoods and artificialities of crowded cities; a simple pastoral address to the people of this small Arcadia.

“If I could only obey him!” Elizabeth thought; at this moment a different creature from the brilliant mistress of the house with the many balconies—the presiding genius of crowded afternoon tea-drinkings, the connoisseur in ceramic ware, who would melt down a small fortune into a service of eggshell Sèvres, or Vienna, or Carl Theodore cups and saucers, and cream-jugs and tea-canisters, for the mere amusement of an idle morning; a widely different being from her whose last ball had astonished the town by its reckless extravagance; whose milliner’s bill would have been formidable for Miss Killmansegg.

By nature a creature of impulse, carried away by every vain wind of doctrine, she was at least accessible to good influences as well as evil, and was for this one brief hour exalted, purified in spirit by the power of her old lover’s pleading—pleading not as *her* lover, only as one who loved all weak and erring human creatures, and had compassion unawares for her.

“Does he know?” she wondered; “does he know that I

hear him? Surely he must have cast one of his penetrating glances this way."

Nothing in his tone or manner indicated the surprise or emotion which might have accompanied such a recognition. If he had seen her the sight had not moved him, the memories which shook her soul to its centre had no power to touch him. He was like rock. She remembered the old bitter cry that had gone up from her lips in those dreary days when she had waited for his coming back to her—

"His heart is stone!"

Strange that a heart should be so tender for all mankind, yet so hard for her.

"There was a time when I thought my love was worth any man's having, just because they told me I was prettier than other women. Yet *he* has shown me that he could live without it, that he could have it and hold it, and let it go without a pang."

Not once during the half-hour in which he spoke to his listening flock had she dared lift her eyes to his face. Sweet though it was to hear him, it was almost a relief when the sermon ended. She breathed more freely, stole one little look at the pulpit where he knelt, saw the dark head and strong hands clasped before it, and wondered again if he knew that she was so near. Then came the chink-chink of the sixpences, the gradual melting away of the congregation, and she was standing before the gothic doorway. This time Donald did not keep her waiting. The carriage was ready for her. She drove home very slowly, still wondering.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Thou hear'st the winter wind and weat,
 Nae star blinks through the driving sleet;
 Tak' pity on my weary feet,
 And shield me frae the rain, jo.
 The bitter blast that round me blaws
 Unheeded howls, unheeded fa's:
 The cauldness o' thy heart's the cause
 Of a' my grief and pain, jo."

LORD PAULYN left Scotland in the following week, to go to Liverpool, where there were races being run in the early autumn, and his friends departed with him, to be replaced by a relay of other friends when he returned to Slogh-na-Dyack—a return

which was at present problematical. There were a good many races crowded together at this "back end" of the year: a late regatta at Havre, where Lord Pauly had pledged himself to sail his yacht, the *Pixy*; races at Newmarket, at Pontefract, at the Curragh of Kildare, in all which events his lordship was more or less interested.

So the two ladies were left alone in the Norman château, to sit in the long tapestried drawing-room, with its modern antiquities, a kind of Brummagem Abbotsford collection, which had filled the soul of the knife-powder manufacturer with pride during his brief occupation of his castle. They were alone, and were fain to stay indoors for the greater part of the week, week, during which period there was rain; such rain as does at times bedew Scotia's fair countenance; rain persevering, rain incessant, cloud above cloud piled Pelion-upon-Ossa-wise on the mountain-top, and discharging torrents of water. Every tiny waterecourse upon the hill-side, a narrow thread of silver in fair seasons, was broadened to a small cataract; every lowland river overflowed its rugged banks, and brawled and blustered over its stony bed, with a turbulent air, as if some long-imprisoned spirit of the stream had broken suddenly loose and were eager to make havoc of the country-side.

Very long and dreary seemed those rainy autumn days to the mistress of the château and her uncongenial companion. Elizabeth secluded herself in her own rooms, and tried to read, or tried to draw, or tried to find a tranquillising influence in her piano,—a Broadwood, with a sweet human tone in its music; a tone that answered to the touch of the player, and was not all things to all men, after the fashion of some newer and more brilliant instruments. She played for hours at a time—played out her sorrows, her brief flashes of joy, which were at most the joys of memory, her moments of exaltation, her intervals of despair—played and was comforted, or laid her head upon the piano and wept soothing tears. She had nothing human on this earth to love; the life that she had chosen for herself left her outside those small tepid loves or likings which are the *pis-aller* of less self-contained spirits. Even the thought of Blanche, her favourite sister, in these moments of despair, inspired only a shudder. She loved her dog better than anything else in the world—except that one person of whom only to think was a sin—and the dog, being dumb, seemed to sympathise with her, or at least never uttered trite commonplaces in the way of consolation, but looked up at her with dark solemn loving eyes, and seemed to be moved with human pity, when she wept upon his broad honest head.

At last there came a break in the sky; the clouds upon the hill-tops rolled away, and disclosed the blue heaven whose face

they had veiled so long; the cheerful sunshine brightened the waters; cornfields and green pastures on the shores of Bute ceased to be blotted out by the inexorable rain. The world was born again, as when Noah's ark came aground on the topmost peak of Ararat. The occasional fine days of a Scotch summer are apt to be very fine, and this last glimpse of summer's splendour crowning the brow of autumn was bright and glorious.

Elizabeth was somewhat cheered by this change in the weather. It gave her at least liberty.

Nor was she slow to avail herself of this recovered freedom. Long before noon she was on the hills beyond sight of Sloghna-Dyack. Those heathery slopes and narrow footpaths by which she went were swampy after the long rains, and wide water-pools lay in every hollow, like polished steel mirrors reflecting the high blue sky; but it is no longer one of the characteristics of a fine lady to take her walks abroad shod in satin slippers, and Elizabeth stepped through mud and swamp with a fearless tread, in her comfortable mountain boots. O sweet autumn breezes, O lovely world! if one could only be satisfied with the delight of mountain scenery, and wide blue lakes sleeping in the rare sunshine!

That week of rain seemed actually to have exhausted the evil propensities of the Caledonian atmosphere; one fine day succeeded another, days whose serenity was only disturbed by half-a-dozen or so of showers, or an occasional tempest of hail; and Elizabeth, who defied brief showers, and even transient hailstorms, or the sudden obscuring of the heavens behind a curtain of black clouds, presage of a passing hurricane—wandered about the mountains in delicious freedom, and seemed almost to walk down the demon of despondency and the sharp stings of remorse. She rarely drove, for she could hardly use her pony-carriage without offering Miss Disney the spare seat at her side, and she loved best to be alone, quite alone, without even Donald the gillie seated behind her, open-mouthed and empty-headed, staring vacantly at the sky.

She liked to climb the hill-side alone, to wander alone among the sheep, who were seldom scared by her light footstep, or to sit upon some craggy bank, where fragments of primæval rock seemed to be mixed up with the heather and the short mountain grass, as if this part of the world had but just emerged, inchoate and unfinished, from chaos. She loved to sit here alone, her sealskin jacket drawn tightly across her chest, defying the autumnal winds, in whose sweet freshness there was a sharp sting now and then, like a faint prophecy of coming winter. Here she had time for sad thoughts, time to repent the foolishness of all her life gone by, and to long, with how vain a longing, that the past could be undone.

Sometimes, as she walked homeward in the beginning of the dusk, foolish fancies would steal into her mind at sight of the white towers and pinnacles of Slogh-na-Dyack rising above the evening mists at the base of the mountain—the thought of what her life would have been if she and Malcolm Forde had inhabited that northern château; how every room in that great house would have been brightened and glorified by domestic love; how sweet to go home from her walks to be welcomed by him; how sweet to stand in the porch at eventide watching for his coming—vain, useless fancies, which consumed her heart; fancies which she knew to be sinful even, but could not put out of her mind.

Thus passed the second week of Lord Paulyn's absence, and there was as yet no hint of his return. Elizabeth was still free to live her own life, a life of utter loneliness, the life of a woman who lived in the past rather than in the present; free to wander among those solitary hills, with the dog Gregarach for her only companion.

Wide and varied as had been her wanderings, she had never yet crossed the path of Malcolm Forde. She had almost left off hoping for or dreading any such encounter. Had she chosen to put herself in his way, to take the village of Dunallen in the course of her rambles, or to loiter among the outlying cottages that sprinkled the hill-side just around the village, she would have been very sure to meet him. But this was just the one thing which Elizabeth, in her right mind, could not do. Nor, had she languished to behold him as the fever-parched wayfarer in a dry land languishes for a draught of cold water, could she have deliberately waylaid him. She knew that to think of him was wrong, yet she thought of him by day and by night, having long lost the empire over her thoughts. But she was still the mistress of her actions, and could keep them pure.

She made the most of the fine weather, however, without coming too near Dunallen; and even when there came threatenings of a change, menacing clouds again brooding over the mountain peaks, she was not alarmed, and left Slogh-na-Dyack as usual, immediately after breakfast, with the faithful Gregarach at her side.

"You are not going out to-day, surely," said Miss Disney, who had come down to the hall to consult the barometer; "the glass has gone back to much rain."

"I thought we ought to have serewed the hand to that particular point the week before last," answered Elizabeth; "much rain seemed to be the normal condition of Scotland. Yes, I am going for my constitutional. I daresay I shall have a shower, but I'm used to that."

"I'm afraid you'll have a storm, and there's not much chance

of shelter among those hills. It's really very wrong of you to run such risks."

"The risk of catching cold, for instance," said Elizabeth contemptuously. "I never catch cold. I sometimes think I have a charmed life, unassailable by the elements."

"You are very lucky, in that particular as well as in so many others. I can scarcely put my head out of doors on a damp day without paying for my imprudence with neuralgia or influenza."

"How disagreeable!" said Elizabeth, looking at her absently. "Come, Gregarach."

She walked rapidly away, under the dull threatening sky, leaving Hilda in the porch, looking after her thoughtfully.

"What a miserable restless creature she is, in spite of her prosperity," she said to herself. "One ought hardly to envy her. Does she ever meet her old lover on those lonely hills, I wonder? No, I scarcely think that. He is not the kind of man to run any hazard of scorching his wings at the old flame, and she—well, no, I do not believe she is bad enough for that. She only wanders about because she is discontented, and still madly in love with the man who jilted her."

Two hours later those ominous clouds upon the mountain resolved themselves to rain, a dense driving rain that came down like a sheet of water, and threatened to extinguish the landscape in watery darkness. Miss Disney stood at one of the drawing-room windows watching the deluge.

"Good heavens, if she is without shelter in such rain as this!" she thought, not without compassion. "What is to become of her?" And then, with a cynical bitterness, "If she were to catch her death of cold it would be very little advantage to me. What is that some poet says?—'Even in their ashes lurk their wonted fires.' But some ashes are quite cold. *Nothing* would rekindle *them*."

On the hill-tops that blinding rain made a worse darkness, a confusion of sound as it came sweeping down with a shrill whistling noise, like the wind shrieking in the shrouds at sea, while ever and anon came the hoarse roar of distant thunder, shaking, or seeming to shake, even those deep-rooted hills. Elizabeth stood beneath the tempest, looking helplessly about her, the dog cowering at her side, wondering what she should do. She was very indifferent to small inconveniences in the way of weather, but this was a tempest which threatened to sweep her off the mountain-side, to whirl her into the teeth of the welkin, unsubstantial and helpless as a tuft of thistledown. Even Gregarach, the deerhound, who should have been accustomed to this war of the elements, shuddered and was afraid.

"If there were a cave, or anything of that kind, handy," she said to herself, trying to look through the rain. She might as well have tried to pierce the curtain of futurity itself. The world was a thing expunged; there was nothing left but herself, her dog, and the deluge.

"The barometer was right for once in a way," she said. "This is 'much rain.' But I thought barometers were things one ought to read backwards, like gipsy women's fortune-telling."

Happily she was not unfamiliar with her surroundings, and could hardly go astray or topple over a precipice unawares. She had roamed the mountain too often for that in her two months of residence at Slogh-na-Dyack. She stood quite still, pondering, while the pitiless rain drenched her garments, reducing even the comfortable sealskin to a black shiny-looking substance, from which the water ran, not as from a duck's back, but soaking the fabric thoroughly as it trickled slowly down.

What should she do? where seek her nearest shelter? Yes, she bethought herself at last of a place of refuge at the base of the lonely hill-side on which she stood, a refuge so insignificant that it had hardly impressed its image on her memory, though she had looked down upon it many a time from this very spot; an object which, in her dire distress to-day, came back to her indistinctly, with a kind of uncertainty, as a thing which might be real or only an invention of her own fancy.

"Yes," she thought, "I do believe there is one solitary cottage down there, at the very foot of this hill. I have a vague recollection of seeing it, and a thin thread of smoke curling up from its poor little chimney, a miserable shanty of a place, with grass growing ever so high on the roof; but O, what a comfort it would be to find myself under a roof of any kind just now! Come, Gregarach, old fellow, we'll make for the cottage."

It was hard work getting down the steep mountain-side in that blinding rain. She had held up her little silk umbrella as well as she could against the violence of the wind—she had now to furl it and make it her staff. Her feet slipped upon the sodden grass more than once during her slow descent, and for the moment she fancied it was all over with her, and she must roll down to the valley, bruised and beaten to death in her swift course. "Such a nasty dirty death!" she thought, with a shudder.

But the firm light feet kept their vantage-ground, the slender figure held itself erect against the buffeting of the wind and the force of the rain-drift, and Lady Paulyn arrived finally, only half-drowned, in the narrow road at the base of the mountain—a lonely cheerless road, at the best of times, skirted by a rocky bank, beneath which ran a deep narrow stream, now swollen to

the width of a small river—a spot that was eminently unattractive except from the artistic and Salvator-Rosa point of view—a region of sterility and gloom, which hopeless grief might choose for its abode, where nature seemed in unison with man's despair, where the braes never bloomed and the birds never sang.

Yes, there was the cottage, “just a but and a ben;” grass growing high upon the steeply sloping roof, the tiny square window obscured by a handful of hay stuffed into one broken pane and a fragment of linsey-woolsey in another. The very abode of desolation, but still a roof to cover one, Elizabeth thought gladly.

The door was shut. She knocked, but no one came; then tried the latch, and opened the door and peered in, an action which even in that moment of extremity brought back the thought of the old days at Hawleigh, when she had stood at cottage doors with so light a heart, so full of vague hope and unacknowledged love.

“May I come in?” she asked gently, unable to see whether the place was occupied, so profound was the obscurity within. Her dog emphasised the question by a fortissimo bark.

Even that loud inquiry brought no reply. “The place must be empty,” thought Elizabeth, and made bold to enter, Gregarach going before her with loud sniffings and a suspicious air.

The little wretched room was unoccupied, but there was some poor apology for furniture in it. A chest of drawers—article most dear to the Scottish mind—a battered old table and one chair, a few odds and ends of crockery on a shelf in a corner, and a good deal of dirt. There were signs of occupation, too; a struggling turf fire on the hearth, and beside the fire an old black saucepan containing some herby decoction, from which came a faintly aromatic odour.

“Odd,” thought Elizabeth, “but I suppose the people are out at work. Poor creatures, I wonder what work they can find to do in such weather as this.”

She took off her jacket, which seemed a mere mass of brown pulp; took off her hat, also sealskin, reduced to the same pulpy condition; and tried to shake off a little of the water which hung in every fold of her garments. She tried to put a little more life into the turf fire, to get something like heat out of it if possible, but it was only a lukewarm fire, and she looked about the room in vain for more turf or a fagot of wood.

“What a wretched place!” she said to herself; “and to think that some poor creature will come here for comfort by and by when his work is done—is thinking of it now, perhaps, and longing for it, and calling it *home*.”

She thought of Slogh-na-Dyack, her own suite of rooms, with

their many windows looking over the water, the infinite luxury, the triumph of man's inventiveness exemplified in every contrivance that can make life pleasant; she thought of the dismal contrast between this home and hers, and of her own discontented mind, to which that costly chateau had seemed no better than a splendid prison.

"Why cannot fine scenery and handsome furniture satisfy one's heart?" she said to herself. "Why must one always long for something else, for some one whose mere presence would make such a shelter as this tolerable, for some one in whose company one would have no thought of worldly wealth or worldly pleasure?"

She looked round the darksome little room—looked up at the low broken ceiling, which was rain-blistered and stained—looked round with a sad smile.

"If Malcolm had married me, and poverty had reduced us to such place as this, I would have been happy with him," she thought. "I would have tucked up my sleeves and scrubbed and toiled, and tried to make this wretched hovel bright and comfortable for him. It would have been my pride to bear deprivation, misery even, for his sake. I could then have said to him, 'You doubted me once, Malcolm, but is not *this* real love?'"

She had seated herself in the solitary chair close by the low open hearth, trying to get a little warmth out of the fading fire, trying not to shiver very much with that wretched sensation of cold and dampness which had crept over her since she had found shelter in the cottage. She had opened the door two or three times and looked out, with a faint hope of seeing some indication of fair weather, or at least some lessening of the rain; but the water-drops came down with a sullen persistence—came down as she had seen them fall day after day from her window, without a break in the watery monotony.

"I wonder if I shall have to stay here two or three days," she thought, "while all the Slogh-na-Dyack people are searching the country for me, and a private detective watching all outward-bound vessels that leave the Clyde, lest I should have taken it in my head to run away to America? It really seems as if I should have to choose between staying here all day and all night, or walking home in the wet. If I could only see a stray boy—a native boy inured to rain—I might send him home for a carriage."

But looking for stray boys seemed almost as hopeless as watching for the ending of the rain; so Elizabeth shut the door, and went back to the dismal hearth, which became every minute colder and more dismal, and to her own sad useless thoughts.

She was startled from her reverie presently by a sudden

activity on the part of Gregarach, who had been quiet enough hitherto, having stretched himself among the ashes, in the hope of getting warm, where he had lain until now, dozing fitfully, and looking up at his mistress wistfully ever and anon, as who should say, "We might surely have found better quarters."

Now he started to his feet, gave his short bark, like the sergeant's cry of "Attention!" and ran to the door communicating with the other chamber of the cottage; a darksome little den, into which Elizabeth had looked when she first took shelter; a room which had seemed to her utterly empty. The door was a little way ajar; the dog pushed it open with his nose, and rushed in.

Elizabeth started up, not frightened—fear and Elizabeth Luttrell had ever been strangers—only anxious; while there flashed across her brain old stories of Scottish shelters, and faithful dogs, whose sagacity had protected their masters from murder.

"I have my watch and purse," she thought, "and all these foolish diamond rings, which I put on my fingers every morning from sheer habit, just as a red Indian tricks himself out with beads and wampum. I should be rather a valuable booty. And this cottage has an uncanny look at the best of times, standing alone, under the shadow of the hill, and with that deep dark river running yonder, ready to swallow up murdered travellers."

She was not frightened, though it was not beyond the scope of possibility that this vision, conjured up half in jest, might be realised in hideous earnest. That sad and bitter smile, so frequent on her lips of late, lighted up her face just now, as she thought how such things have been, and how lives more precious than hers had come to dark and terrible ending.

How well that swift river could keep a secret! It would be so easy a matter to dispose of her. The dog might give a little trouble, perhaps, but a knock on the head would make an end of him, and what resistance could *she* offer? Then would follow a long and tedious quest; rewards offered, heaven and earth moved, as it were, on behalf of a lady of quality, but the mystery for ever unsolved. Dark scandals invented perhaps; her reputation tarnished by foul imaginations. Some people preferring the belief that she was living a shameful secret life somewhere, to the simpler theory of her untimely death.

She could almost fancy what society would say of her in years to come, when her husband had married again and forgotten her.

"O, there was another Lady Paulyn, you know, who disappeared in a curious manner. No one knows whether she is alive or dead: but Lord Paulyn married again, all the same—his cousin, a Miss Disney, a much more suitable match. The first

wife was a very pretty woman, gave capital parties, and so on; but they did not live happily together."

And he would hear of her dark fate, and wonder, and be sorry. Yes, surely even his stony heart would be moved by her dismal end; that most horrible of all dooms, at least to the minds of the survivors, the fate about which there is uncertainty.

She had time for all these thoughts while Gregarach was sniffing about the inner room.

Presently he set up a piteous whine; whereupon Elizabeth, with a calm fixed face, as of one who goes to her doom, pushed the door open again—it had swung to behind the dog—and went boldly into the gloomy den, where murder perchance lurked in the shadow of the sloping roof.

The dog was standing with his forepaws upon a miserable little bed; a bed she had not observed in her first inspection of the chamber; a bed set into the wall, cupboard fashion, after the manner of some Scottish beds, the lower end inclosed by a wooden shutter, the head sheltered by a checked blue curtain, limp and ragged.

A withered skinny hand grasped this meagre drapery,—hardly the hand of a stalwart assassin; a hand of a dirty waxen hue, wasted by age or sickness,—and a feeble voice entreated plaintively, "Tak' awa' the dog."

Elizabeth ran to the bed. "Don't be frightened, he won't hurt you," she said. "Down, Gregarach; down, old fellow. Indeed you needn't be afraid of him; he's a sensible affectionate fellow."

The dog licked his mistress's hand, as if in grateful acknowledgment of this praise. She had as yet seen no more of the occupant of the bed than that skinny hand clutching the curtain; but the curtain was drawn back now, revealing a ghastly figure; a woman, old, or made prematurely old by toil and care and sickness; a face haggard as death itself, under a tumbled nightcap; dim eyes staring at the intruder with vague wonder.

"Something to drink," gasped this helpless creature; "for God's sake give me something—the stuff that auld Becky made."

Elizabeth looked round her helplessly. She could see no sign of a cooling draught for those pale parched lips; not even a pitcher of water, much less the stuff concocted by old Becky, whoever that person might be.

"O, where shall I find you something?" she said. "Poor soul, I'll do anything in the world for you, if you'll tell me how."

"The stuff by the fire," said the woman; "but dinna leave you doggie with me."

The stuff by the fire; that dark concoction in the saucepan.

The recollection of it flashed upon Elizabeth. She called her dog, and went back to the outer room; found a cracked mug, poured some of the dark-looking drink into it, and carried it back to the sick woman, and held it gently to the dry lips, supporting the weary head upon her arm, with a touch of that natural tenderness which had endeared her to the cottagers at Hawleigh.

“Have you been long ill?” she asked.

“Three weary weeks. I’ve kept my bed three weeks, but I was bad before; all my limbs aching, and a weight on my head. I could hardly keep about to do for myself and my son; he’s a farrn labourer, beyond Dunallen; and then I was forced to give up, and tak’ to my bed. The fever’s been mickle bad about these parts.”

“The fever!” repeated Elizabeth, with a faint shiver, but not any shrinking motion of the arm that supported the sick woman’s head.

“Yes, it’s been verra bad; maybe you shouldna be in here; some folks call it catching, but I dinna ken. The Lord knows where I could have caught it, for there’s few folks come my way to bring me so much as a fever, except the new minister. I suppose you are the minister’s wife?”

Elizabeth smiled at the question. “No,” she said, “I’m not the minister’s wife. It was only selfishness that brought me here; I was caught in the storm, and came to your cottage for shelter. But now I am here I may be able to help to get you well. I can send you wine, and tea, jelly, broth, all kinds of things to strengthen you. And a doctor, too, if you’ve had no doctor.”

“I’ve had auld Becky, she kens as much as ony doctor; and the new minister, he knows a deal. And he brings me wine and things, but it’s very little that I can tak’ the noo, I’m so low. There’s some wine in yon cupboard; you might gie me a drappie.”

“Let me settle your pillow more comfortably first.”

She arranged the pillow, fever-tainted perhaps; the whole chamber had a faint foetid odour that tried her sorely. But fear of death, even in this den, where lurked a foe scarce less deadly than the assassin of her imagination, she had none. The day was past when her life had been worth cherishing. She placed the pillow under the weary head, wiped the damp brow with her handkerchief, murmured a few comforting words, phrases she had learned in the brief period of her ministrations, and then went to the cupboard, a little hutch in the corner, to seek for the wine.

The new minister; that was he, no doubt. She touched the bottle almost reverently, thinking that his hand had sanctified

it. The woman hardly put her lips to the cup; it was only by gentle entreatings that Elizabeth could induce her to take a few spoonfuls of the wine. Not all the vintages of Oporto could have brought back life or vigour to that worn-out habitation of clay, in which the soul fluttered feebly, before departing for ever.

There was a Bible on a chair by the shuttered end of the bed.

"Will you read me a chapter?" asked the woman, after an interval of feeble groanings and muttered lamentations.

Elizabeth opened the book immediately, chose that chapter of chapters, that tender farewell address of Christ to his Apostles, the fourteenth of St. John, and began to read in her low earnest voice, as she had read many a time in the sunny cottages at Hawleigh, with the bees humming in the myrtle-bushes outside the window, the green trees waving gently under the summer sky. This gloomy hovel in the shadow of the mountain seemed a bit of another world.

She read on till the patient sank into an uneasy slumber, breathing heavily. And then, seeing her to all appearance fast asleep, Elizabeth laid the book down, and looked at her watch. It was nearly five o'clock; the day, which had been dark at two, was growing darker; the rain, which she could just see through the clondy glass of the narrow casement, was still coming down steadily, with no symptom of abatement.

"It is clear I shall have no alternative between walking home in the rain or staying here all night," thought Elizabeth. "Or, stay: this poor soul spoke of her son; he will come home by-and-by, perhaps, and he might fetch the carriage for me."

There was comfort in this hope. Though not afraid of the fever, she was not a little desirous to escape from that tainted atmosphere, in which to breathe was discomfort. And yet it seemed cruel to leave that helpless creature, perhaps to die alone.

"I must try to find a nurse for her, somehow," she thought; "I'll ask her about this old Becky when she wakes. It seems almost inhuman to let her lie here alone."

She wondered that Malcolm Forde had not done more for this stricken creature. But there were doubtless many such in his flock, and he had done his utmost in bringing her wine and coming to see her now and then.

The woman had been asleep about half-an-hour, while Elizabeth sat and watched her, thinking her own sad thoughts, when the outer door was opened. It was the son returning from his work, no doubt. Elizabeth rose, and went to meet him, anxious to have tidings of her whereabouts conveyed to Slogh-na-Dyack before nightfall.

She had her hand upon the door between the two rooms, when another hand pushed it gently open. Drawing back a little, she found herself face to face with Malcolm Forde.

She could see, plainly enough, that for the first few moments he failed to recognise her in the half-light of that dismal chamber. He looked at her, first in simple wonder, then with eager scrutiny.

"Good God," he cried at last, "is it *you*?"

"Yes," she answered, with a feeble attempt to take things lightly. "Did you not know we were such near neighbours? Strange, isn't it, how people are drawn together from all the ends of the earth, Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia?"

He seemed hardly to hear her. He was looking at the bed with an expression of unspeakable horror.

"Come into the next room," he said, drawing her quickly across the threshold, and shutting the door upon the sick chamber. "What brought you to this place?"

"Accident. I came here to find shelter from the rain."

"You had better have stayed in the rain. But God grant that you may have taken no harm! I come here daily, and stay beside that poor creature's bed for an hour at a time. But I believe custom has made me fever-proof. You must get home instantly, Lady Paulyn; and take all possible precautions against infection. That woman has a fever which may be—which I fear is—contagious; but I trust in God that your superb health may defy contagion, if you are only reasonably careful."

He opened the outer door to its widest extent. "Let us have as much air as we can, even if we have some rain with it," he said. "It is too wet for you to go home on foot. I must find some one to run to Slogh-na-Dyack and fetch your carriage."

"You know where I live, then?" with a wounded air. It seemed so stony-hearted of him to be quite familiar with the fact of her vicinity, and yet never to have broken down the barriers of reserve, never to have approached her in his sacred character. To be careful for all the rest of his flock, for all the other sinners in this world—Fiji islanders even—and to have not one thought, not one care, no touch of pity for her!

"Yes," he answered, in his cool grave way, imperturbable as the very rock, looking at his watch thoughtfully. "The young man will not be home till seven perhaps. I must go to Slogh-na-Dyack myself."

"What, through this rain! O, please don't, you'll catch your death of cold."

"I came here through this rain, and I am very well protected," he said, glancing at his macintosh. "Yes, that is the only way. Promise me that you will stand at this open door till your carriage comes for you."

“But if that poor soul should call me, if she should be thirsty again, I can’t refuse to attend to her, can I, Mr. Forde?”

“What, you have been attending to her—hanging over her to give her drink?” with a look of intense pain.

“Yes, I have been arranging her bed a little, and giving her some wine you brought, and doing what I could to make her comfortable. It reminds me of—of the old time at Hawleigh, when I had a short attack of benevolence. O, please don’t look so anxious. I am sure not to catch the fever. What is that line of somebody’s?—‘Death shuns the wretch who fain the blow would meet.’ I am just the kind of useless person who never dies of anything but extreme old age. You will see me creeping round Hyde Park, forty years hence, in a yellow chariot and a poke bonnet, with pug dogs and a vinegar-faced companion.”

“You have not left off your old random talk,” he said, regretfully. I cannot forbid you to obey the dictates of humanity. If the poor old woman should ask you for anything, you must give it. But do not bend over her more than you can help, and do not stay in that room longer than is absolutely necessary. I have arranged with a woman at Dunallen to come and nurse her. She will be here to-night.”

“I am glad of that, and I shall be still more glad if you will let me contribute to your poor. May I send you a cheque to-morrow?”

“You may send me as many cheques as you like. And now, good-bye. The carriage will be here before I can return.”

He gave her his hand, with an air so frank and friendly that it stung her almost as if it had been an insult, pressed the little ice-cold hand she gave him in his friendly grasp, and went out into the rain.

“He never, never, never could have loved me,” she said to herself, looking after him with a piteous face, and bursting into a passion of tears. What had she expected? That he, Malcolm Forde, the man who had given his life to God’s service, would fall on his knees at the feet of Lord Paulyn’s wife, in the surprise of that sudden meeting, and tell her how she had broken his heart five years ago, and how she was still much more dear to him than honour, or the love of God?

“He looked frightened at the idea of my having caught the fever,” she thought, when she had recovered from that foolish burst of passionate anger, bitter disappointment, unreasoning and unreasonably love. “But that was only from a philanthropic point of view; just as a family doctor would have done. Was there ever any one so impenetrable? One would think we had never been more than the most commonplace acquaintance, and had only parted from each other a week ago.”

She stood leaning against the door-post, looking at the dreary waste of sodden turf, the fast-flowing river, the mountain on the other side of the valley, which was like a twin brother of the mountain behind the cottage.

She stood thus, lost in gloomy thought, thought that was more gloomy than the landscape, more monotonous than the rain, when a footstep sounded a little way off. She looked up, and saw Mr. Forde coming back to her.

"I met a lad who was able to carry the message faster than I could," he said, "so I have returned to prevent your running any risk by ministering to that poor soul yonder."

He looked into the other room; the woman was still asleep. He waited a little by the bed-side, and then came back to the doorway where Elizabeth stood looking out at the turbid water.

"How long is it since you were caught in the rain?" he asked—a foolish question, perhaps, inasmuch as it had rained without ceasing for the last four hours.

"I hardly know; it seems an age. I was wandering about the mountain for ever so long, not knowing what to do, till I happened to remember this cottage, and then we came down, my poor drenched dog and I, and I crept in here for refuge. And I seem to have been here half a lifetime."

Half a lifetime, more than a lifetime, she thought; for were not the joys and sorrows of any common existence concentrated in this meeting with him? The dog was licking his hand, with abject affection, as if he too had known this man years ago, and been parted from him, and loved him passionately throughout that severance; but strange creatures of the dog-tribe had a habit of attaching themselves to Mr. Forde.

"And you have been in your wet clothes all this time," he said anxiously, with the pastor's grave solicitude, not the lover's alarm. "I fear you may suffer for this unfortunate business."

"Rheumatism, or sciatica, or lumbago, or something of that kind," she said; "those seem such old women's complaints. I daresay I shall have a fearful attack of rheumatism, and my doctor and I will call it neuralgia, out of politeness. No one on the right side of thirty would own to rheumatism." This, with her lightest good-society manner.

"I should recommend you to send for your doctor directly you get home, and take precautionary measures."

"I have no doctor," she answered, a little impatiently. "I hate doctors. They could not save the child I loved—and——" Her lip quivered, and the dark beautiful eyes filled, but she brushed away the tears quickly, deeply ashamed of that confession of weakness.

"You have lost a child?" said Mr. Forde. "I heard nothing of that. I know very little of the history of my old friends since

I left England. I did hear of your dear father's death, and was deeply grieved, but I have heard little more of those I knew at Hawleigh."

Not a word of her marriage; but he had heard of that, no doubt; had heard and had felt no surprise, taking it for granted that she was engaged to Lord Paulyn when he set forth upon his mission.

"I am sincerely sorry to hear you have lost one so dear to you. But God, who saw fit to take your little one away, may, in his good time——"

"Please do not say that to me. I know what you are going to say; it has been said to me so often, and it only makes me more miserable. I could never love another child as I loved him, the one who was snatched away from me just when he was growing brighter and lovelier every day. I could never trust myself to love another child. I would keep it a stranger to my heart. I would take pains to keep it at a distance from me. I should think it a dishonour to my dead boy to love any other child. But don't let us speak of him. I have been forbidden ever to speak or to think of him."

"Forbidden? By whom?"

"By the doctors. I don't know what made me speak of him just now. It is like letting loose a flood of poisoned waters."

He looked at her gravely, wonderingly, with a look of unspeakable sorrow. Was it for this she had broken faith with him? Had all the splendours and vanities of the world brought her so little joy? The wan and sunken cheek, the too brilliant eye, told of a heart ill at ease, of a life that was not peace.

"Let us talk of yourself," she said, in an eager hurried manner. "I hope you found the life—about which you had dreamed so long—a realisation of your brightest visions?"

"Yes," he answered with a far-off look, which of old had always suggested to Elizabeth that she was of very small account in his life. "Yes, I have not been disappointed; God has been very good to me. I go back to my work at the close of this year, and to work in a wider field."

"You go back again, back again to that strange world!" with a faint shudder. "How little you can care for your life, and for all that makes life worth having!"

"For life itself, for the bare privilege of existence in this particular world, I do not care very much; but I should like to be permitted to finish my work, so far as one man can finish his allotted portion of so vast a work."

"And the savages," said Elizabeth, "did they never try to kill you?"

"No," he answered, smiling at her look of terror. "Before

they could quite make up their minds to do that, I had taught them to love me."

"And you will go out to them again, and die there! For if they spare you, fever will strike you down, perhaps, or the sea swallow you up alive in some horrible shipwreck. How can you be so cruel—to yourself?"

"Cruel to myself in choosing a pathway that has already led me to happiness, or at least to supreme content!"

"Supreme content! What, you had nothing to regret in that dreary, dreary world? O, I know that it is full of flowers and splendid tropical foliage, and roofed over with blue skies, and lighted by larger stars, and washed by greener waves, than we ever see here; but it must be so dreary—twelve thousand miles from everything."

"From Bond-street, and the Burlington-arcade, and the Royal Academy, and the opera-houses," said Mr. Forde, as if he had been talking to a wayward child.

"Do you think I am not tired enough of those things and this world?" she cried passionately. "Why do you speak to me as if I were a baby that had never cut open the parchment of its toy-drum to find out where the noise came from? I asked you a question just now. Had you nothing to regret in your South-Sea islands?"

"Nothing, except my own worldly nature, which still clung to the things of earth."

She looked at him curiously, wondering whether she was one of those things of earth for which his weak soul had hankered. His perfect coolness was beyond measure exasperating to her. It was not that she for one moment ignored the fact that for those two there could be no such thing as friendship—no sweet communion of soul with soul, secure from all peril of earthly passion, in that calm region where love has never entered. She knew that this accidental meeting was a thing not to be repeated without hazard to her peace in this world and the next, or to such poor semblance of peace as was still hers. Yet she was angry with him for his placid smile, his friendly anxiety for her welfare, the quiet tones that had never faltered since he first greeted her, the grave eyes that looked at her with such passionless kindness. If he had said to her, "Elizabeth, I have never ceased to love you—we must meet no more upon this earth"—she would have been content; but, as it was, she stood looking moodily down at the angry river, dyed red with the clay from its rugged banks, telling herself over and over again that he had never loved her, that he was altogether adamant.

Being a woman, and not a woman strong in the power of self-government, she could not long devour her heart in silence.

The wayward reckless spirit sought a relief in words, however foolish.

"You do not even ask me if I am happy," she said, "or how I prospered after your desertion of me."

"Desertion!" he echoed, with a short laugh; "women have a curious way of misstating facts. My desertion of you! Desertion is a good word. Forgive me for not having inquired after your happiness, Lady Paulyn. I had a right to suppose that you were as happy as every woman ought to be who has deliberately chosen her own lot in life. I trust the choice in your case was a fortunate one."

"I had no choice," she answered, in a dull despairing tone, looking at the river, not daring to look at him. "I had no choice. I went the way Fate drifted me, as helpless or as indifferent as that tangle of weeds yonder, carried headlong down the stream. I was miserable at home with my sisters; so, thinking any kind of life must be better than the life I led with them, I married. I have no right to complain of my marriage; it has given me all the things I used to fancy I cared about, long ago, when I was a vain silly girl; nor have I any right to complain of my husband, for he has been much better to me than I have ever been to him."

"Why do you palter with the truth?" he cried sternly, turning upon her with an angrier look than she had seen in his face, even on the day when they parted. "Why do you try to disguise plain facts, and to deceive me, even now? What pleasure can it give you to fool me just once more? What do you mean by being drifted into your marriage, or why pretend that you married Lord Paulyn because you were miserable at home? You were engaged to him before you left your aunt's house. You were married to him as soon as my back was turned."

"That is false!" cried Elizabeth. "I was not engaged to him till you had left England."

"What, he was not your accepted lover when I saw you in Eaton-place—when I showed you that newspaper?"

"He was not. The newspaper and you were both wrong. I had refused Lord Paulyn twice. The last rejection took place the night before that morning, the night of the private theatricals at the Rancho."

She held her head high now, the sweet lips curved in a scornful smile, proud of her folly—proud, even though she had wrecked her own life, and had perchance shadowed his, by that very foolishness.

"And you suffered me to think you the basest of women—to surrender that which was dearer to me than my very life—only because you were too proud to tell me the truth!"

"Would you have believed if I had told you? I don't think

you would. You had judged me beforehand. You would hardly let me speak. You believed a printed lie rather than my piteous looks—the love that had almost offered itself to you unasked that night at Hawleigh. You could think that a woman who loved you like that would change in two little months—could be tempted away from you by the love of rank and money. I never thought that you could leave me like that. I was sure that you would come back to me. O God, how I waited and watched for your coming! how I hated those fine sunshiny rooms in Eaton-place which saw my misery! And then when I went back to Hawleigh, thinking I *might* see you again, perhaps, and you *might* forgive me, I was just in time to hear your farewell sermon. And when I went to your lodgings the next morning, to beg for your forgiveness—yes, I wanted you to forgive me before you left us all for ever—I was just too late to see you. Fate was adverse once more. The train had carried you away.”

“You went to my lodgings!” he exclaimed, with breathless intensity. “You would have asked me to forgive you, me, the blind besotted fool who had been duped by his own passion! You loved me well enough to have done that, Elizabeth!”

“I would have kissed the dust at your feet. There is no humiliation I could have deemed too great if I could have only won your forgiveness; not won your love back again—the hope of that had no place in my heart.”

“My love!” he said, with a bitter smile. “When did that ever cease to be yours?”

Her whole face changed as he spoke, glorified by the greatness of her joy. He had loved her once—and that once had been for ever!

But not long did passion hold Malcolm Forde in its thrall. He felt the foolishness of his words so soon as they had been uttered.

“It is worse than idle to speak of these things now,” he said. “If I wronged you by a groundless accusation, you wronged me still more deeply by withholding the truth. That day changed the colour of our lives. Of my life I can only say that it is the life to which I had long aspired, which I would have sacrificed for no lesser reason than my love for you. It has fully satisfied my desires. I will not say there have been no thorns in my path, only that it is a path from which no earthly temptation could now withdraw me. For yourself, Lady Paulyn, I can only trust—as I shall pray in many a prayer in the days to come, when we two shall be on opposite sides of the world—that your life may be filled with all the blessings which Heaven reserves for those who strive to make the best use of earthly advantages.”

"You mean that having made a wretched mistake in my marriage, and having lost the child who made life bright for me, I am to console myself by church-going and district-visiting, and by seeing my name in the subscription list of every charity."

"The field is very wide," he said, every trace of passion gone from voice and manner. "You need not be restricted to a conventional rôle. There are innumerable modes of helping one's fellow-creatures, and no one need despair of originality in well-doing."

"It is not in me," she answered wearily. "And if I were ever so inclined to help my fellow-creatures, my opportunities henceforward are likely to be limited. I have been guilty of culpable extravagance; it is so difficult to calculate the expense of what one does in society, and I never was good at mental arithmetic. In plain words, I have made my husband angry by the amount of my bills, and I shall henceforward have very little money at my command."

"I should have supposed that Lady Paulyn's pin-money would be ample fund for benevolence, which need not always be costly," said Mr. Forde, conceiving this self-abasement to be merely a mode of excusing her disinclination for a life of usefulness.

"I have no pin-money," she answered carelessly. "I refused to have a settlement. When a woman marries as much above her as I did, there is always an idea of sale and barter. I would not have the price set down in the bond."

"Your husband will no doubt remember that generous refusal when he has recovered from any vexation your unthinking extravagance may have caused him."

"I don't know. We have a knack of saying disagreeable things to each other. I have not much indulgence to expect from him. Do you ever pass our house at Slogh-na-Dyack?"

"Sometimes."

"Sometimes," she thought, with exceeding bitterness; and he had never been tempted to cross the threshold, never constrained, in his own despite, as passion would constrain a man who could feel, to enter the house in which she lived, to see with his own eyes whether she was happy or miserable.

"And yet he talks of having never ceased to love me," she said to herself.

Then resuming her old light tone—the tone that had so often jarred upon his ear in the bygone time—she said,

"When next you pass Slogh-na-Dyack, think of me as a prisoner inside those high white walls, a prisoner looking out at the water, and envying the white-sailed ships that are sailing round Cantyre, the sea-gulls flying over the hills. It is a very

fine house, and I have everything in it that a reasonable woman could desire; but I feel that it is my prison, somehow."

"How do you mean?"

"Lord Paulyn has brought me here to retrench. He is a millionaire, I believe, but millionaires are not fond of spending money, and, as I told you just now, I have spent his with both hands. Pray don't think that I am complaining, only—only, when you go past my house, think of me as a solitary prisoner within its walls, and pity me if you can."

The assumed lightness was all gone now, and in its stead came piteous tones of appeal.

"Pity you!" he cried passionately. "Are you trying to find out the quickest way to break my heart? You had always a knack at playing with hearts, Elizabeth; do not speak to me any more. Pity me. I am weaker than water. Why do you not tell me that you are happy—that the world, and the pleasures and triumphs of the world, are all-sufficient for you? Why do you wish to distract my soul by these suggestions of misery? And to-night, perhaps, amongst your friends, you will be all life and brightness—a creature of smiles and sunshine—as you were in the play that night."

"I can act still," she said, with a faint laugh. "But it is too much trouble to do that at Slogh-na-Dyack. I have no friends there; it is a hermitage, without the peace of mind that can make a hermitage pleasant. Don't look at me so sorrowfully. I shall go back to London, I daresay, in the spring, if I am good, and shall give parties, and spend more money, while you are among your Fiji islanders."

Malcolm Forde answered nothing, but stood with a gloomy brow staring at the rushing water. What a shallow nature it seemed, this soul of the girl he had loved once and for ever; what a childish perversity and capriciousness, and yet what dreary suggestions there were in all her talk of a depth of misery lurking below this seeming lightness! Ah, what torture to part from her thus, knowing nothing of what her life was like in the present, what it might become in the future; knowing only that it was not peace, and that all those loftier hopes and nobler dreams which had sustained him in the darkest hours of his existence were to her a dead letter!

They kept silence, both watching the dark and turbid river, almost as if it had been that river in the under world by which they must each stand one day, waiting for the grim ferryman. But in a little while the sound of wheels mingled with the noise of the water—wheels and horses' feet approaching swiftly on the wet mountain road.

"Thank God!" said Mr. Forde; "the carriage at last. How you shiver! I must beg of you to remember what I have

said about taking prompt means to ward off the cold, and it would be as well to take some precautionary steps against infection: not that I fear any danger from that," he added hopefully. Then, looking at her with undisguised tenderness—for was it not, as he believed, his very last look?—"Elizabeth, I shall pray for you all my life. If the prayers of any other than yourself can give you peace and good thoughts and a happy life, you will never lack those blessings. Good-bye."

He held her hand for a little while, looking at her with those dark searching eyes which she had feared even before she loved him; looking through her very soul, trying to pierce the thin veil of pretence, to fathom the mystery within. But even at the last she was a mystery too deep for his plummet-line.

"Good-bye," she said, and not one word more, remembering that other parting, when, if speech could have come out of her stubborn lips, she might have kept him all her life. What could she say now, except good-bye?

He put her into the dainty little brongham, wrapped her in the soft folds of a fur-lined carriage-rug, gave the coachman strict injunctions to drive home as fast as his horses would safely carry him, and then stood bare-headed at the cottage-door watching her departure.

CHAPTER IX.

"My God! I never knew what the mad felt
 Before; for I am mad beyond all doubt!
 No, I am dead! These putrifying limbs
 Shut round and sepulchre the panting soul,
 Which would burst forth into the wandering air.
 What hideous thought was that I had e'en now?
 'Tis gone; and yet its burden remains here,
 O'er these dull eyes—upon this weary heart!
 O world! O life! O day! O misery!

* * * * *

She is the madhouse nurse who tends on me.
 It is a piteous office."

WHETHER a careful compliance with Mr. Forde's behest would have saved Elizabeth from the evil consequences of that one wet day, it is impossible to say. She took no precautions; she was utterly reckless of her own safety, hating doctors and all medical appliances with a childish hatred, and never from her childhood upwards having cared to take any trouble about her-

self in the way of preserving her health. That health had hitherto been a splendid inheritance which recklessness could hardly reduce. She had run wild in the Devonian woods wet-footed and caring no more for the damps of morass or brooklet than a young fawn; she had roamed the moor in the very teeth of the east wind, had lingered latest of all the household in the Vicarage garden when the heavy night-dews were falling; she had sat up late into the nights reading her favourite books, had existed for weeks at a time with the least possible allowance of sleep, and had hardly known what it was to be ill.

"I almost wish I could set up a chronic headache like Diana's," she used to say in those days. "It is so convenient occasionally."

But after her boy's death had come an illness which concentrated into nine long weeks of anguish more than some feeble souls suffer in a lifetime of weak murmurings and complainings.

rain-fever, it would have been called most likely, had the patient been any one else than Lord Paulyn's wife; but the specialists, who met three times a week in solemn conclave to discuss the diagnostics of the case, found occult names for the ailments of a person of quality. That nameless fever of mind and body, engendered of a wild and desperate grief, came and passed away; but not without severely trying the strength of the mind, which had been the greater sufferer. The inexhaustible riches of a superb constitution saved the body, but that weaker vessel the mind foundered, and at one time was menaced with total shipwreck.

Now fever again took possession of that lovely temple—the lowest form of contagious fever—and rang its dismal changes from gastric to typhus, from typhus to typhoid. Wet garments, tainted air, did their fatal work. After a week or so of general depression, occasional shivering fits, utter want of appetite, and continued sleeplessness, the fever-fiend revealed himself in a more definite form; and the local surgeon—resident five miles from the château—declared, with infinite hesitation and unwillingness, that in his opinion Lady Paulyn was suffering from a mild form—a very mild form, and entirely without danger—of the low fever that had been hanging about the neighbourhood this year.

This declaration was made, in the most cautious and conciliating manner, to Lady Paulyn herself, in the presence of Hilda Disney; the disagreeable fact disguised with an excessive show of confidence and hopefulness on the doctor's part, just as he contrived to conceal the flavour of aloes or rhubarb in his silvered pills.

Elizabeth turned her haggard fever-bright eyes to him with a strange look. She had been sitting in a moody attitude till now, staring fixedly at the ground.

"I have had fever before," she said; "and that time my mind went. I could not believe it for long afterwards, but I know now that it did go. I hope that is not going to happen to me again."

"My dear lady,"—Elizabeth shuddered; the specialists, or in other words mad-doctors, had always called her "dear lady,"—"there is not the smallest cause for such an apprehension. In fever there is occasionally a slight delirium, purely attributable to physical causes. But I trust that with care there may be nothing of the kind in your case."

"With care!" repeated Elizabeth. "Yes, I remember they said that when I was ill before. I heard them, as I lay there helpless, repeating the same words every day like parrots. But then I only wanted to die, and to go to my darling; and I don't know that it matters much more now. Only I don't want to lose my mind, and yet go on living. If I am to die young, let me die altogether, not like Dean Swift, first a-top."

The Scotch surgeon, an eminently practical man, shook his head a little at this, with a grave side-glance at Miss Disney; then murmured his directions: quiet—repose—the saline draughts, which he would alter a little from those of yesterday and the day before—and, above all, care. It would be as well to send to Glasgow for a professional nurse, lest the duties of the sick-room might be beyond the scope of Miss Disney or Lady Paulyn's maid. This was mentioned in confidence to Hilda when she and the surgeon had left Elizabeth's room together.

"It is not going to be serious, I hope," said Hilda.

"I apprehend not. No; I venture to think not. With youth, and so fine a constitution—no organic disease—I have every reason to imagine the fever will pass off in a few days, and a complete restoration ensue. But the want of sleep and of appetite are unpleasant symptoms, and her ladyship's mind is more excited than I should wish. I think, as it is a case which no doubt will inspire some anxiety in the mind of Lord Paulyn, and as he is absent from home, it might be wise to fortify ourselves with a second opinion." This was said with an air of proud humility, as who should say, "I feel myself strong enough to cope with the diseases of a nation, but usage must be observed, according to the statute in such case made and provided;" for medicine has its unwritten laws, its unregistered acts of an intangible parliament. "I should like Dr. Sauchiehall to see Lady Paulyn."

"Pray telegraph to him at once," said Hilda anxiously; "and I will telegraph to my cousin."

With this understanding they parted. The doctor to drive his neat gig to the little bathing-place five miles off, whence he could send a telegram to Glasgow; Hilda to pace the terrace,

under a gray autumn sky, watching, or seeming to watch, the white rain mists rolling up from the mountain crests, and meditating this new turn in affairs.

How would Reginald take his wife's illness? They had parted with a palpable coolness; on her part indifference, smothered anger on his. Would all his old selfish vehement love rush back upon him with redoubled force if he found his wife in jeopardy? Such hours of peril, as it were the shadow of the destroyer lurking on the threshold of a half-opened door, are apt to awaken dormant affections; to rekindle passions that seemed dead as death itself.

"I know that he loves her still," thought Hilda. "Those flashes of anger spring from the same root as tender looks and sweet words: he loves her still, with quite as much real affection, and as near an approach to unselfishness as he is capable of feeling. And if she were to die—he would never love any one else; would marry again perhaps, but for money, no doubt, the second time. And I—well, I should be always in the same position, a miserable hanger-on, outside his life. God give me patience to do my duty to both of them; to the man who amused a summer holiday by breaking my heart, and the woman who has usurped my place in the world."

To communicate by telegraph or post with Lord Paulyn was no easy matter, or there was at least small security that a telegram would find him. His address was fugitive; at Newmarket to-day, on board his yacht in Southampton Water, bound for Havre, to-morrow. Hilda telegraphed to Newmarket and Park-lane, trusting that one of the two messages might reach him without delay. She also wrote him a letter, addressed to Park-lane, in which she gave him a careful account of Elizabeth's symptoms, and the medical man's remarks upon them. Having done this she felt that she had done her duty, and could abide the issue of events with a complacent mind.

But a harder and more painful duty remained to be done; the patient had to be watched and cared for, and that task Miss Disney deemed herself, in a manner, bound to perform. A horrible restlessness had taken possession of Elizabeth. Weak as she was, she wanted to roam from room to room, out on to the lonely walk even, under the dull gray sky; and Mr. McKnockie, the local surgeon, had especially directed that she should be kept in perfect quiet, and in her own room—that she should straightway take to her bed, indeed, and, as it were, prostrate herself at the feet of the fever fiend.

Against this Elizabeth protested with all her might, declaring that she was not ill, that she had nothing the matter with her but cold and sore-throat, and that Mr. McKnockie was only trying how long a bill he could run up with his vapid tasteless

medicines. Air, fresh air, was all she required, she cried; and she flung open the French window, and went out into the balcony, in spite of Hilda.

"O sea, sea, sea," she cried, looking away towards that opening in the hills where the waters widened out into ocean, "if you would only carry me away to some new world, a world of dreams and shadows, where I should have done with the burden of life!"

Alas, she was only too near that world of dreams and shadows! Before nightfall she was delirious, watched over by hired nurses, a prostrate wretch concerning whom the doctors Sauchiehall and McKnockie shook their heads almost despondently. Fever of mind and body raged together with unabating violence. She had entered the region of dreams and shadows; and in that long delirium, during which all things in the present were blotted out, or only seen dimly athwart a thick cloud, her mind went back to the past. She was a child again, following the windings of the Tabar, or losing herself in the wood where the anemones were like snow in April; she was a girl again, her childish unspoken love for Malcolm Forde ripening slowly, like a bud that ripens to a blossom under a gentle English sun, until it bursts into bloom and beauty, the perfect flower of woman's heart.

In that drama of the past which she lived over again, there were not only scenes that had been, but scenes that had not been. With the loss of sober reason and the perception of surrounding things, invention was curiously quickened. Memory, which was beyond measure vivid, ran a race with imagination. That brief span of her springtide courtship, the few short weeks of her engagement to Malcolm Forde, were spun out by innumerable fancies of the distracted brain. She recalled walks that they had never walked, long wanderings over the moor; wild poetic talk; the converse of spirits which had issued forth from the doors of this solid world into a vast cloundland, a place of dim unfinished thoughts and broken fancies.

It was distracting to hear her talk of these things; it was a madness almost maddening to watch or listen to. The hired nurses made light enough of the business; haled their patient about with their coarse hands, tied her even with bonds when she was too restless for their endurance; ate, drank, slept, and rejoiced, while she lay there in her dream-world, entreating Malcolm to loosen those cruel cords, to take her away out of the stifling atmosphere that was killing her.

Miss Disney made a point of spending some hours of the day or night in the sick-room; and in these hours Elizabeth fared a little better than at other times. The tying process was at any rate not attempted in Hilda's presence. But consciousness

of all immediate events being in abeyance, the hapless patient knew not that she was being protected by this quiet figure in a black-silk gown, which sat statue-like by the hearth, and she was exceedingly tormented by the sight of it. In her more desperate moods she even accused Miss Disney of keeping her a prisoner in that horrible room, and separating her from her plighted lover.

Here was one of the mental obliquities which made a part of her disorder. Her husband and her married life, even her lost child, were forgotten; were as things that had never been. Nothing stood between her and her first lover, except the bondage that kept her to that hated room. He was at all times close at hand, waiting for her, calling to her even, only she could not go to him. Every creature who held her back from him was her enemy; and chief among these, the despotic mistress of her prison-house, the arbiter of her fate, was Hilda Disney.

Matters were in this state when Lord Paulyn came back to Slogh-na-Dyack, tardily apprised of his wife's illness by the telegrams, which had followed him from stage to stage of his wandering existence. He found the doctors at sea, only able to give stately utterance to the feeblest opinions, but by a curious fatality issuing orders which in every minutest detail were opposed to the desires of the patient.

In her more lucid intervals she had languished for the sight of old faces, the sound of old voices. She had entreated them to send for the old servant who had nursed her, the old Vicarage servant who had been part-and-parcel of her home in the happy childish days before her mother's death, before she had begun to be proud of her beauty and to grow indifferent to the commonplace present in selfish dreams of a much brighter future. She spoke of the woman by her name, remembering all about her with a singular precision, at which the doctors looked at each other, and wondered; "Memory extraordinarily clear," they remarked, like heaven-gifted seers divining a fact which it was not within the power of common perception to discover.

Then came a longing for her sisters, above all for Blanche, the young frivolous creature who had loved her better than she had ever loved in return. Piteously, in her most reasonable moments, she implored that Blanche might be summoned.

"She would amuse me," she said, "and I want so much to be amused; all is so dull here, such an awful quiet, like a house under a spell. For Heaven's sake, if there is any one in this place who loves me, or pities me, let them send for my sister Blanche."

Miss Disney, faithful to her duties in a semi-mechanical way, informed the medical men of this wish.

"Would it not be well to send for Miss Luttrell?"

No, they said. Isolation—perfect isolation—offered the only chance of recovery. Lady Paulyn was to see no one except the persons who nursed her. No old familiar faces—inspiring violent emotions, agitating thoughts—were to approach her. Even Miss Disney, who might be permitted to take her turn occasionally in the patient's room, must be careful not to talk to her—not to encourage anything like conversation. Soothing silence must pervade the chamber—sepulchral as the room where the mighty dead lie in state. When Lord Paulyn came, he might see his wife, but with such precautions as must reduce any meeting between them to a nullity. The dismal monotony of a sick-room was to be Elizabeth's cure; the hard cruel visages of hireling nurses were to woo her back to reason and peace: so said Dr. Sauchiehall, Mr. McKnockie, as in duty bound, agreeing.

Lord Paulyn came at a time when mere bodily illness had been well-nigh subjugated, and that nicer mechanism, the mind, alone remained out of gear. He was allowed to stand for a few minutes in the shadow of the curtains that draped his wife's bed; and having the misfortune to come in an unlucky hour, heard her rave about her first lover, and upbraid the tyrants who had severed them. He turned upon his heel, and left the room without a word; nor did he enter again until, upon a terrible occasion, some weeks later, when the malady had increased—even under those favourable circumstances of utter isolation and the care of hireling nurses—and he was summoned to his wife's room to prevent her flinging herself out of the window by the sheer force of his strong arm.

She was clinging to the long French window when he went into the room—an awful white-robed figure with streaming hair and flashing passionate eyes, the two nurses trying to drag her back, but vainly striving against the unnatural strength that waits upon a mind distraught.

“Why do you keep me back from him?” she cried. “He is down yonder by the water waiting for me, as he has waited always. I heard his voice just now. You shall not keep me back. Do you think I am afraid of the danger? At the worst it is only death. Let me go?”

Lord Paulyn's strong arm thrust the nurses aside, grasped the frail figure, whose convulsive force was strangled in that muscular grip. She struggled with him, and was hurt in the struggle—hurt by the grasp of that broad hand, which seemed so brutal in its strength. She looked at him with her wild fever-bright eyes.

“I know you now,” she said; “you are my husband. The other was a sweet sad dream. You are the bitter reality!”

He flung her into the arms of the head nurse—a virago six

feet high. "If you cannot take better care of your patient, I must have her put where they will know how to look after her without boring me," he said; and left the room without another look at the only woman he had ever loved. There are some flames that burn themselves out very soon, the fierce love of selfish souls among them. The warmth of Lord Paulyn's affection for his wife had long been on the wane. Her extravagances had tried his temper, touching him deeply where he was most susceptible, in his love of money. Her illness had annoyed him, for he detested the fuss and trouble of domestic affliction. This second calamity struck a final blow to his self-love, with which was bound up whatever yet remained of that other love. That her wandering mind should set up "that parson fellow" in his rightful place—should erase him, Reginald Paulyn, from the story of her life—harking back to that old foolish sentimental story of her girlhood, was too deep an offence.

He sat by his lonely hearth, and brooded over his wrongs—his wife's base ingratitude, his childlessness—hardly daring to look forward to the future, in which he saw the creature he had once loved menaced with the direst affliction humanity can suffer. He summoned the mad-doctors—the men who had taken out a kind of patent for the manipulation of the distraught mind—the men who had called Elizabeth "dear lady," a year ago, in Park-lane. They came, and agreed in polite language, which shirked the actual word, that Lady Paulyn was very mad; they feared hopelessly, permanently mad. Nature, of course, had vast resources, they added, sagely providing for the event of her recovery—there was no knowing what healing balm she might ultimately produce from her inexhaustible storehouse—but in the meantime there could be no doubt of the main fact, that her ladyship was suffering from acute mania, and must be placed under fitting restraint.

There was a little discussion as to which of the doctors should have the privilege of ministering to this amiable sufferer. One had a charming place—an old-fashioned mansion of the Grange order in Surrey; the other a handsome establishment on the north side of London. They debated this little matter between themselves, like polite vultures haggling about a piece of carrion, perhaps drew lots for the patient, and finally arranged everything with an air of agreeable cordiality. The physician whose house was in the north had won the day.

"You must contrive to get me through any formalities that may be necessary as easily as you can," said Lord Paulyn, "It's a horrible business, and the sooner it's over the better. Poor thing! She was the loveliest woman in England, bar none, when I married her. I feel as if we were committing a murder."

“Be assured, my dear sir, that the dear lady could not be more happily placed than with our good friend Dr. Cameron,” said Dr. Turnam, the gentleman who had resigned the prey to his brother patentee. “If skill and care can restore her, rely upon it they will not be wanting.”

The Viscount sighed, and went back to his solitary smoking-room, breathing muttered curses against destiny. She had worn out his love; but to think of her handed over to this doctor—consigned, perhaps, to a life-long imprisonment—that was hard. What should he do with himself, when she who had made the glory of his life was walled up in that living grave? He had Newmarket still, and his stables; and at his best he had given more of his life to the stable than to Elizabeth. But he felt not the less that his life was broken—that he could never again be the man that he had been; that even the hoarse roar of the ring and the public when his colours came to the front in a great race would henceforth fall flat upon his ear.

CHAPTER X.

“Yes, it was love, if thoughts of tenderness
 Tried in temptation, strongest by distress,
 Unmov'd by absence, firm in every clime,
 And yet, O! more than all!—untir'd by time;
 Which naught remov'd, nor menac'd to remove—
 If there be love in mortals, *this* was love.”

A GROOM fell upon the spirit of Malcolm Forde after that meeting in the sick woman's cottage. The thoughts of his old life, his old hopes, bright dreams of union with the woman he fondly loved, pleasant visions of a simple pastoral English life among people it would be his happiness to render happy, a fair prospect which he had cherished for a little while, only to lose it by and by in bitterness and disappointment—the thoughts of these things came back to him and took the sweetness out of his pleasant existence, and made all the future barren.

It was hard to know that he had his own impetuosity to blame for the ruin of his earthly happiness; harder to be content remembering how he had been permitted to realise that other and unselfish dream of carrying light to those that sat in darkness; hard to say, “Lord, I thank Thee; Thou knowest best what is good for me; Thou hast given me far more than I deserve.”

Not yet could his spirit soar into this holy region of perpetual peace ; a region where sorrows are not, only mild chastenings of a heavenly Master, who leavens every affliction with the leaven of faith and hope. His thoughts were of the earth, earthy. His mind went back to that day in Eaton-place, and he hated himself for his unreasoning anger, for the false pride which would not let him court an explanation ; for his blind passion, which had taken the show of things for their reality.

He thought of what might have been if, instead of casting away this flower of his life on the first indignant impulse of his jealous mind, he had shown a little patience, a little tenderness. But he had seemed incapable of patience on that odious day ; with his own angry foot he had kicked down the air-built castle which it had been so sweet to him to raise.

If he had found her happy, serene in the glory of her high position, secure in the sympathy and affection of a worthy husband, he would not have felt his own loss so keenly ; he could have borne even to know that she had never loved him better than in that luckless hour when he renounced her. But to know that her life had been shipwrecked by his mad anger—to look into her haggard face, with its sad mocking smile, and know that she was miserable—to read the old love in those lovely eyes, the old love cherished always, confessed too late by unconscious looks that pierced his very soul—these things were indeed bitter.

For a while he forgot his profession ; forgot what he was, and the work that still remained for him to do ; sank from his lofty level of self-renouncement to the lowest depths of a too human despair. If the image of his lost love had haunted him in that strange romantic world amid the waters of the Pacific, how much more did that sad shade pursue him now, when the woman he still loved was near at hand, when from the hill-side which he had daily need to pass he could see the white walls of the house she had called her prison !

Never more might his eyes search the secrets of that altered face—the face which he remembered in all the pride of its girlish beauty. Never any more might those two meet. To all other world-weary souls he might carry consolation, might breathe words of promise and of hope ; but not to her. Between them rose the barrier of a mighty love, unconquered and unconquerable.

He went his quiet way with that great sorrow in his heart. Had he not carried almost as great a sorrow even in the islands of the southern sea ? only that he had then regarded his loss as inevitable, while he now lamented it as the wretched fruit of his own fatuity. He went his quiet way and did the little there was to be done in that scantily-peopled district, visited the sick,

comforted the dying; but the work he did just now was done in a semi-mechanical way, for his heart was elsewhere.

It would have been a relief to him if he could only have heard of her; if there had been any one who could tell him how she fared. He looked at the white walls, the conical towers, longingly, yet would not go near them. To enter there would be to enter the gates of hell. But he would have risked much to hear of her.

His eyes searched the little chapel at every service, but saw her not. Yet this might augur nothing except that she instinctively avoided him, with an avoidance he must needs approve.

Weeks passed, and he heard nothing; and that mountain scene seemed strangely blank to him, as if that one figure, met only once, had filled the whole landscape. Then came a day on which duty took him near Slogh-na-Dyack. He went to see a sick child in a cottage within half-a-mile of the château; and here, almost by accident, he first heard of Lady Paulyn's illness.

He had asked the boy's mother if she had everything necessary for him; everything the doctor had ordered. Yes, she told him, they got everything from the big house where the poor lady was so ill.

He had been bending tenderly over the fever-stricken child, but he looked suddenly upward at these words.

"What house? what lady?" he asked quickly.

"The house with the peaky lums," the woman answered. "Lady Paulyn, who took the fever, and is lying ill with it still; near death, some folks say."

He laid the sick boy gently down upon his pillow, and then questioned the woman closely. She could tell him no more than she had told him in that one sentence. The lady at Slogh-na-Dyack had been dangerously ill; the doctors came there every day: a doctor from Glasgow, and another doctor from Ellens-bridge. Some said she was dying; but she had lain sick so long, and hadn't died, so there was hopes of her getting well. The fever had been quicker with poor bodies like hersen. It was a good many weeks now since Lady Paulyn had been took.

What could he do? He left the cottage, and walked straight to Slogh-na-Dyack, with no definite idea as to what he should do, only that he would at least discover for himself how far the woman at the cottage had been right. Those people always exaggerate; pick up wild versions of common facts. Elizabeth might have been ill, perhaps, but not dangerously. He tried to persuade himself this as he walked swiftly along the misty road.

He did not stop to consider his right, or want of right, to approach her. Such an hour as this made an end to all such questions. If she were dying, it was his duty to be near

her; to sustain that poor weak soul, of whose mystery he knew more than any other man on earth. By his right as a minister of God's word and her dead father's friend, he would claim the privilege of being near her at the last dark hour.

The land in front of the château looked gray and gloomy in the twilight, the darkness only broken by the red light of a wood fire in the hall. A pompous butler, imported from Park-lane, and sorely averse to this Northern establishment, was basking in a Glastonbury chair before the cavernous fireplace, yesterday's *Times* lying across his knees, to-day's *Scotsman* and *Edinburgh Daily Review* crumpled into the corner of the chair; the seneschal having dropped comfortably off to sleep after exhausting the news of the day.

Disturbed by the entrance of Malcolm Forde, this functionary rose from his slumbers, and imperiously commanded an underling to light the gas, "which is about the honly convenience we 'av in this detestable barracks of a place," he was wont to say, "and 'av to make it ourselves in the kitchen-garding, at the risk of being blowed out of our beds."

Questioned by Mr. Forde, this personage affirmed that Lady Paulyn was ill, very ill; but not in any danger. She had been in danger three weeks ago, when the fever was at its height; but there was no danger now.

"Yet you say that she is still very ill."

"Very ill, sir; leastways, she keeps her own room; but is, I believe, progressing towards convulscence. Would you wish to see Miss Disney, sir? Lord Paulyn have gone to Hinverness for a few days' deer stalking, but Miss Disney is at home."

"No; if you can assure me that Lady Paulyn is out of danger, I need not trouble Miss Disney. But in the event of danger, I should be very glad if that lady would send for me. You can give her my card. I am an old friend of Lady Paulyn's family."

He gave the butler his card, and went away relieved, but still uneasy.

How gloomy the house looked! The dark oak staircase, with its mediæval newels; the Scottish lion rampant, supporting the shield of the knife-powder manufacturer, whose conventional quarterings Lord Paulyn had not taken the trouble to efface; the vaulted roof, with its bosses and corbels in carton pierre, and gloomy as the ancient woodwork from which they had been modelled; the black and white marble floor, with skins of savage beasts laid here and there; the suits of mail glimmering in the firelight, the underling not yet having brought his taper: a dismal Udolpho-like place it looked at this hour, in spite of the chief butler's portly presence.

"A parson, I suppose," mused the butler, when the figure of

Malcolm Forde had vanished from the porch, beneath whose shadow he had lingered a few moments to look back into the house, wondering whether amidst all this pomp *she* was loved and well cared for. "A parson, I make no doubt. What a rum lot they are, to be sure! as bad as ravens—hanging about a house where there's any one dying. One would think they went pardners with the undertaker. Let's have a look at his pasteboard," he continued aloud, while the gas was being lighted. "The Reverend Malcolm Forde. Why, I'm blest if that isn't the chap she was engaged to before we married her! Fancy his coming area-sneaking here while his Ludship's out of the way."

For about a fortnight after that evening Mr. Forde sent a messenger to Slogh-na-Dyack, at intervals of two or three days, to inquire about Lady Paulyn; and the reply being always to the effect that her ladyship was progressing favourably, he comforted himself with the idea that all danger was past, and finally told the messenger he need go no more. His own residence at Dunallen was drawing to a close; Mr. McKenzie writing cheerily from divers Belgian towns, where he and his family were enjoying the glories and pleasures of continental travel, on an economical scale; but writing still more cheerily of his approaching return to the home-nest.

"After all, my dear Forde, there's no place like our own wee parlour; and there's nothing in the way of foreign kickshaws, partridges with stewed pears, and the Lord knows what, that I relish as much as a sheep's-head or a few broth. And I think my wife's potato-soup beats your *potage à l'Italienne* or your *purée aux pois* hollow. The hills about Spa are a poor business compared with Argyleshire; and if it wasn't for being covered with firs, would be paltry beyond comparison. As it doesn't do for a white choker to adorn the gaming-table, I had rather a dull time of it, and was glad when we got back to Liége, where the churches and gun factories are unapproachable. I saw some wood-carving about the choir stalls that would have set your ritualistic mouth watering, only that, now you've given yourself up to foreign missions, you've turned your back upon that kind of thing."

Malcolm Forde's time at Dunallen was nearly ended; thank God the peril had passed! He could leave her with a heart that was almost at peace; for by this time he had schooled himself to accept his fate—the lot out of God's hand—and to pray in humility and hope for her ultimate happiness.

Thus came the last day but one of his service at Dunallen. He had been at work from early in the morning, going from dwelling to dwelling—dwellings which were chiefly of the cottage order—taking leave of people to whom he had made

himself ~~sear~~ in the short space of his ministration among them; promising to remember them at the other end of the world, in compliance with their desire that he would sometimes think of them when he was far away. He answered them with a somewhat mournful smile, thinking of that other memory which would cleave to him for the rest of his life.

There was weeping and wailing in all these humble habitations at the prospect of his departure. Mr. McKenzie was a good man and a kind, they all protested warmly; and Mrs. McKenzie's potato-soup and honest barley-broth kept soul and body together in many a household through the bleak long winter; but Mr. McKenzie wasn't like Mr. Forde. He had a little dry way of talking to folks, and didn't enter into the very thoughts of poor bodies like his substitute. Nor could he preach so fine a sermon as Mr. Forde; a strong point with these critical Caledonians.

His day's labours were ended at last. He had trodden the heather-clad hills he loved so well for the last time; had taken his last look at Slogh-na-Dyack's white towers; and he sat by his solitary hearth thinking how very soon he should have left this well-known land to resume his work among a strange people.

Not unhopefully did he look forward to new toil, new anxieties. The eager thirst of conquest, which urges the missionary as it urges the warrior, had grown somewhat languid with him of late; he could not feel quite the old enthusiasm. "I go to reclaim the lost among a strange people," he thought, "while the soul that I love best on earth may be perishing; the soul that I might have trained to such a high destiny."

He had letters to write—much still to do before leaving Scotland; but he sat by the lonely fireside in the gloaming, lost in melancholy thought. The neat little maid-servant came to ask if she should bring the lamp; but he told her no, he liked the firelight. "It is a pleasant light for thinking by, Meg," he said.

A pleasant light, perhaps; but his thoughts were not pleasant. He tried to confine them to the actual business of his life, the work that lay before him in the future; but they would not be directed. They clung with a passionate regret to the scene he was about to leave. They hung around the white-walled château; they wandered in and out of those unknown chambers where Elizabeth lived; they would not be diverted from her.

"If she were well and happy it would be different," he said to himself, in self-exculpation.

He sat on till the chapel clock had struck nine. The October night was blustery, wild gusts rattling the window-frames,

and rustling the ivy with a gruesome and ghostly sound, as of disembodied souls striving for admittance. The moon was up, and by fits and starts emerged from a stormy sea of blackest clouds, lighting up the wild landscape, the water at the foot of the hill. It was during one of these sudden bursts of moonlight that Mr. Forde, happening suddenly to look up, saw a strange figure outside his window; a face white as the moonlight, peering in at him through the glass. For a moment he looked at it in dumb wonder, taking it for the embodiment of his own troubled fancies, a mere visionary creature; as if that melancholy sound of the ivy leaves against the glass had made itself a shape out of the shadows.

It was very real, however. A hand tapped upon the pane, with a hurried imperious tapping. He got up from his chair, and went over to the window.

Great Heaven! it was that one woman whose image absorbed his every thought; it was Elizabeth!

"Let me in!" she cried piteously, in tones that seemed strange to him; stranger even than her presence in that spot. He opened the window softly.

"I will come round to the door and let you in," he said; "for Heaven's sake what has happened?"

"Only that I have cheated them all at last," she said, looking at him with wild beseeching eyes; "I have broken loose from my bondage. O Malcolm, you will not let them take me back again?"

Something—an unutterable indefinable something—in her tones and looks struck him with a sharper pain than he had felt even yet; though almost all his thoughts of her had been pain. He rushed across the room, and the tiny hall beyond it, to the door, only a few paces from the window by which she stood. He opened it quickly, went out into the wintry night, and found her still rapping impatiently upon the pane, as if she had not heard or comprehended what he said to her.

She was clad in some loose long garment of the dressing-gown species, and had a shawl flung carelessly over her shoulders; but neither hat nor bonnet. Her long rippling hair fell loosely about her, mixed with the folds of her shawl.

"Dear Lady Paulyn," he said very gently, "what could have induced you to come here at such an hour? Good heavens, you have surely not walked?" he added hastily: looking down the long moonlit road, where there was no vestige of any vehicle.

"Yes; I have come all the way on foot, and alone. I was afraid at first that I might not find you; but there was some instinct led me right, I think. Sometimes I saw you a little way before me in the moonlight, and you turned. now and then,

and smiled and beckoned to me. Your smile drew me after you. Why do you live so far off, Malcolm? you were so much nearer at Hawleigh. I remember that morning I came to see you, only to find you gone—it seemed so short a walk; but to-night it was like walking on for ever and ever.”

“Come into the house,” he said, in a curious half-muffled voice, a deadly fear rending his heart. “Come into the warm room, Elizabeth; you are shivering.”

“Not with cold,” she said hastily; “with fear.”

“Fear! of what?”

“That they’ll follow me, and take me away from you. They’ll guess where I’ve come, you know; as you and I are engaged to be married. My horrible jailers will hunt me down, Malcolm; Hilda at their head. Hilda, who is the worst of all—not rough and cruel with her hands like the others—but cruel with her cold watchful eyes, that are looking me into my grave.”

What was this? the delirium of fever? He had been told that the fever had passed, that she was almost well. They had deceived him evidently; they denied his right to know what progress she made towards recovery or towards death. They had mocked him with their lying messages.

He put her shawl round her, and drew her into the house. He could keep her here long enough for her to rest and refresh herself, while a messenger went to Slogh-na-Dyack to fetch a carriage to convey her home. This was obviously his duty. She had talked wildly of her jailers; she had entreated him not to deliver her up to them: yet his first act must needs be in a manner to betray her. His duty was clearly to restore her into the hands of her friends.

That wild horror of Hilda and of her nurses could but be the raving of delirium. They were doubtless kind enough in their way—even if it were not the kindest way—only hired service, or the task-work imposed by duty. It was common for these poor fever-distracted souls to exhibit a horror of their best friends—to fly from them even as she had fled. No, there was nothing for him to do but restore her to her own home—to that lonely pile which had seemed to him so darksome and gloomy a habitation that autumn twilight when he crossed its threshold for the first time.

He led her into the parlour, where pine-logs and sea-coal were burning cheerily, led her into the ruddy home-like light, her weary head resting on his shoulder; as it had never rested since the night when he asked her to be his wife, and let all the scheme of his existence drift away from him upon the floodtide of passion. He placed her in the big easy-chair by the hearth, removed her shawl, damp with the night dew, and then planted

himself by the opposite side of the mantelpiece, watching her with grave anxiety, thinking even in this sad moment how fair a picture she made in the firelight, a sad forlorn face with troubled eyes, a listless figure half-shrouded in a veil of golden-brown hair. If it were his duty, as he felt it was, to communicate with her friends, there was time enough to dispatch his messenger. He wanted her to speak a little more clearly first, to discover the full significance of her fear.

She sat for some minutes in silence staring absently at the fire, with a half smile upon her face, as if exhausted by her long walk, and feeling a physical satisfaction in the warmth and rest. Then, after what seemed to Malcolm a very long pause, she looked slowly round the room, still smiling, and this time with more meaning in her smile.

"How pretty your room looks in the firelight!" she said in her old light tone, which smote him to the heart at such a time. "But your rooms are always pretty, with books and things—much prettier than my grand rooms, crowded with pictures, and gilding, and finery, and a hundred colours that make my eyes ache to look at them. I like this sober brown-looking parlour, like an interior by Rembrandt. This is the first time that I have been in any room of yours since I came to you that morning at Hawleigh. But we were not engaged to be married in those days!" she added, smiling innocently up at him, as if she were saying the most reasonable, the most natural thing in this world.

"Our engagement!" he said gravely, "that is an auld sang, and came to an end long ago. Let us talk of the future, Lady Paulyn, not of the past."

She watched him as he spoke, with a curious look, as if she saw him talking without hearing what he said.

"It was before we were engaged," she went on, pursuing her own line of thought. "How soon are we to be married, Malcolm? When we are married you can take me away from that dreadful room," with a shudder, "that horrid room where I lie awake night after night watching the candle burn slowly down—O, how slowly it burns!—and the reflection of the flame in the shining oak panel. It was clever of me to find out that about the candle, wasn't it? They took away my watch, and got tired of telling me what o'clock it was, or were too unkind to do it; and then I thought of King Alfred and the candles, and knew by their burning when morning had nearly come."

He sighed—a heartbroken sigh—and sat down by her, taking her hand gently. "Dear Lady Paulyn," he began, with a stress upon the name, "I want to decide, with your help, what we had better do. This long dreary walk must have tired you so much. You have been very ill——"

She turned upon him sharply, with flashing eyes. "Do not say that to me," she cried angrily; "that is what all the doctors said; 'Dear lady, you have been very ill;' talking to me in their soothing sugary tones, as if they were reasoning with a baby in arms. I told them that I was not ill—that I was quite as well as I had ever been in my life—only that I wanted to be let out of that hideous room, to go out upon the hills, to come to you, Malcolm," with sudden tenderness.

"And you see I was right," she went on, after a little pause. "If I were ill, do you suppose I could have walked ever so many miles? and I came along almost as fast as the wind. I ran part of the way. Could I do that if I were ill, Malcolm?"

He was silent for a few moments, his head turned away from her and from the firelight, his face quite hidden. The first sound that broke that silence was a smothered sob.

She looked at him wonderingly.

"Malcolm, why are you unhappy about me? Don't you understand that I am not ill? What does it matter to us if all those doctors talk nonsense? You can send them all away when we are married."

"Elizabeth," he said with tender earnestness, taking her thin cold hand in his, and holding it while he spoke,—alas, there was no sign of bodily fever in that poor little hand! it was that greater fever of the mind which he perceived here, with supreme anguish,—“Elizabeth, there is a kind of illness in which the mind is the chief sufferer, an illness of which it seems to me the best means of cure are in the hands of the patient, and not the doctor. Patience and resignation, dear, are the means of cure which God has given to us all. If anything has made you unhappy, if anything has disturbed your peace of mind, pray to Him for help, for consolation, for cure. They will come, Elizabeth; believe me, they will come.”

She looked at him wonderingly for a few minutes, as if there were something in his words that made her thoughtful. He was the first person who had ever spoken to her of her mind, who had ever boldly told her that all was not well there. The doctors had simpered at her, and tut-tuted and patted her gently on the head, as if she had suddenly gone backward in years and become a child of two. They had made pretty little affectionate speeches of a sugar-plum fashion, never giving her a direct answer to her eager questions, putting off everything blandly till to-morrow, till she began to think the order of the universe was changed, and time was all to-morrow. And then they left her to lie on her bed and wonder from dawn to sunset, from night till morning, and to weave strange romances in her ever-working brain, for lack of any reality in her life except the horrible reality of the room she hated and the nurses who ill-

used her. But this was part-and-parcel of the magical process of isolation whereby she was to recover her wits.

"There is nothing the matter with my mind," she said "What should there be the matter now that I am with you, and happy? There never was anything the matter with me except the silent horror of that room, and those rough-handed women who stared at me, and worried me from morning till night with medicines and messes, jellies and beaftas and things, making believe that I was ill. But you won't give me back to them—you won't let them take me away from you? Promise me that, Malcolm; mind, you must promise me that," half rising from her chair and clinging to him.

"My dearest, do not ask me to make an impossible promise. I have no alternative. It is my duty to restore you to your friends. You cannot remain here; and where can you so properly be as in your own house? Try to think, Elizabeth, what the world would say if it knew that you wished to leave your husband and your own proper home!"

"My husband!" she repeated, with a cold laugh—"my husband! That is what Hilda said to me one day. The nurses talk of *my* delusions; why, there can be no delusion so wild as that! As if I could have any other husband than you, Malcolm, after that night in the Vicarage garden when I almost asked you to marry me. My husband! Go back to my husband, go away from *you* to my husband! What, Malcolm, are you going to talk nonsense like all the rest?" she asked, looking round with a helpless bewildered air. "I begin to think that every one in the world is going mad except myself."

"Elizabeth, if you would only try to remember. It is quite true that old promise was made, dear, and you and I were to be together all our lives. But Providence has ruled otherwise. A foolish mistake of mine divided us, and then, after a little while, you found another lover whose constancy and devotion must have gained your gratitude and esteem, if not your love, for you married him. Remember, Elizabeth, you are the wife of Lord Paulyn. You owe affection, duty, obedience to him, and you are bound to go back to the shelter of his roof. If it seems dismal and strange to you while you are so ill, dear, be assured that fancy will pass away. Only pray for God's help, pray to Him to banish all evil fancies."

"Evil fancies!" she cried, staring at him with wide-open wondering eyes, and an expression that was half perplexity, half contempt for his persistent folly. "You are like the rest, Malcolm, mad, mad! How dare you say that I am married! how dare you say that I have ever been false to you! Good heavens, have I not thought of you without ceasing since the first night of our engagement, that night when we stood by the Vicarage

gate, Malcolm, and you confessed you loved me? I did wring that confession from you at last; and O, how proud it made me, as if I had tamed a lion and made him lie down at my feet!"

She was silent for a few moments, looking down at the fire with a happy smile, placidly happy in that supreme egotism, that curious self-concentration, which is one of the characteristics of lunacy, as if living over again that hour of triumphant love, the hour in which she had proved that passion may be stronger than principle even in a good man's breast.

"Why do you talk to me of husbands!" she cried, with a little burst of anger. "There is a man at Slogh-na-Dyack who ill-treated me, hurt me with his strong cruel grasp, dragged me away from the window when I wanted to escape to you. He is not my husband. You won't send me back to *him*, will you, Malcolm? O God, you could not be so cruel as that! If you knew how I watched day after day, night after night, before this chance came, before I could get away from that hateful room! They kept my door locked in my own house—think of that, Malcolm—the door locked upon me as if I had been a refractory child! I watched them to find out where they put the keys of the two doors. But they would not let me see, and it was only to-night for the first time that I cheated them. They were both out of the room—no one there, not even Hilda, my arch enemy, who has tried to poison me. Yes, Malcolm, you will not believe, but I have seen it in her face—only I have refused to eat, and baffled her that way. I have refused to touch anything for days, till they forced me to swallow their abominable messes," with a look of unutterable disgust, "bending over me with their odious breath, and clutching me with their great hot hands. Malcolm!" starting up from her chair, and appealing to him passionately, with outstretched hands, "swear that you will not give me back into their power! Kill me if you like, if you have quite left off loving me, if I am no use to the world or you—kill me, Malcolm; death from your hands would not be painful—but don't send me back to that locked room! Good heavens, why do you stand there looking at me like that? Are you afraid of them, afraid of Hilda Disney, afraid of that stony cruel man you call my husband?"

"What am I to do?" he cried, not yet able to master even his own thoughts, at sea on a stormy ocean of doubt and pity and love and honour. To see her thus, beautiful even in the utter wreck of reason, loving, humble, confiding, the pride that had been her blemish extinguished for ever—to see her thus, casting herself upon his love, appealing to his manhood, and yet to feel himself powerless to help her in the smallest degree, unable to stand for a moment between her and her sorrow—this was an ordeal beyond the worst peril of his wanderings, beyond

the circle of yelping savages, the fire kindled at his feet, which he had considered among the possibilities of his career. He constrained himself by a supreme effort of his troubled mind to contemplate the situation calmly, as if he had been interested only in his priestly character, called upon to advise or direct in such an emergency.

"No," he exclaimed at last; "you shall not go back to Slogh-na-Dyack, if I can prevent it."

She gave a cry of joy, a wild passionate cry, as of a soul released from purgatory.

"Thank God!" she cried. "O, I knew that you would not send me back! Let me stay with you, Malcolm; let me follow you in all your wanderings. Do you think I fear hardship, or famine, or weariness, where you are? Let me teach the little children in those savage lands. Children have always loved me, and I them. Remember how I nursed the children at Hawleigh. Let me go with you, Malcolm. I will be anything you order me to be, a slave to work for those wretched people," with a faint shudder, as if she had not yet overcome her idea of the general commonness of the missionary order. "I will endure everything—toil, danger, death—if you will let me be with you."

He did not answer her, except with a long look of sorrowful tenderness—parting the loose hair gently from her forehead with a protecting touch, which was curiously different from the patronising pattings of the faculty—contemplating her with a deploring tenderness. He could not answer her. To reason—to attempt to awaken dormant memories—seemed useless. The doors of her brain had shut up the story of her wedded life. It was not in his power to recall her to a sense of her actual position—to rend the veil which shut out the realities—leaving her soul in a fool's paradise of dreams.

He had arranged his plan of action meanwhile. He rang for the lamp, and the honest Scottish lassie, entering with the lighted moderator, beheld with obvious consternation the figure of a lady, with pale face and disordered hair, clad in a long purple garment, slashed and faced with satin—a garment such as Maggie the housemaid had never looked upon before, a garment fastened with cords and tassels, which the lady's restless fingers knotted and unknotted again and again while Maggie stared at her.

"Tell your brother to saddle Trim," said Mr. Forde, in his quietest manner: "I want a message taken to the railway station at Ellensbridge."

He looked at his watch thoughtfully. No, it would hardly be too late to send a telegram from that small station.

"Ye'll no' be sending the night, Mr. Forde," said the girl, "the station'll be shut."

"No, it won't, Maggie. Tell your brother to get the pony ready this minute. And then come back to me for the message."

He took the lamp to a desk on the other side of the room, where he had the blank forms for telegrams and all business appliances, and, without farther deliberation, wrote the following message:

"Malcolm Forde, Dunallen, Argyleshire, to Gertrude Luttrell, Hawleigh, Devon, England.

"Your sister, Lady Paulyn, is dangerously ill. Come at once to this place. A case of urgent necessity. Telegraph reply."

He filled another form with almost the same words addressed to Mrs. Chevenix, Eaton-place-south. And having delivered these to Maggie, with strict instructions as to haste and care in the manner of transmitting them, he began to consider how soon either of these women could reach that remote spot. It was too late for Mrs. Chevenix to leave town by the limited mail. She could only arrive at Dunallen upon the following night, just twenty-four hours after the sending of the telegram. And during that interval how was he to protect Elizabeth from her natural protectors—from people who had an unassailable right to the custody of this helpless creature?

His only hope lay in the chance that they might not guess where she had gone; yet he hardly dared hope as much as that, when Miss Disney knew that he was in the neighbourhood, and doubtless knew that he had once been Elizabeth's betrothed husband. His first thought, the telegrams being despatched, was to find her a fitting refuge. He had friends enough in the cosy little hill-side colony, friends who, in the common acceptance of the phrase, would have gone through fire and water to serve him, though they had only known him seven weeks. He debated for a little while—a very little while—for moments were precious, and he had already lost much time, and then decided upon his plan of action. Two ancient maiden ladies, his devoted admirers, lived in a snug little villa hardly five minutes' walk from the manse—friendly Scotch bodies, upon whose kindness and singleness of heart he could rely. With these two ladies he might find the fittest shelter for the forlorn being who had cast herself upon his care. Lodged safely here, she might, perhaps, escape pursuit for a little while—just long enough to bring the friends of her girlhood round her, so that she might at least have her sister by her side when she went back to Slogh-na-Dyack.

"Wrap your shawl closely round you, Lady Paulyn," he said.

"I am going to take you to a house where you can sleep to-night—to friends who will take care of you."

"Friends!" she cried. "I have no friends in the world but you. Let me stay here—with you. O, Malcolm, you are not going to send me away after all?"

"I am not going to send you back to the people you fear—as I believe without reason. I am going to put you in the charge of two good friends of mine—kind old Scotch women, who will be very good to you."

"I want no one's goodness," she exclaimed impatiently. "Why can I not stay here with you?"

"It is quite impossible."

"But why?"

"Because you have a husband and a house of your own."

She shook her head angrily. "He is madder than the rest," she muttered.

"And I should do very wrong to detain you here. I fear that, if I did my duty, I should at once communicate with your household at Slogh-na-Dyack."

"You will not do that!" she cried, starting up, and clinging to his arm.

"No, Elizabeth, I cannot do that—against your wish. I will see you placed in safe hands, and perhaps to-morrow one of your sisters, or your aunt, may be here to protect you."

"One of my sisters," she repeated dreamily. "I should like to have Blanche with me. I was always fond of Blanche."

"Come, then, the less time we lose the better."

He went out into the hall, she following him, and thence to the garden in front of the manse. He gave her his arm as they went out into the windy road, white in the moonlight, but they had scarcely crossed the boundary when she gave a shrill scream and darted back towards the house. Two women, one tall and gaunt-looking, were standing in the road, a few paces from the brougham, which seemed to be waiting for them.

The tall woman advanced to meet Mr. Forde, the other ran back to the carriage, and exclaimed to some one inside, "We've found her, Miss Disney, we've found her!"

"What do you want?" asked Malcolm, his heart sinking with a sickness as of death itself. Vain had been his hope of putting himself between her and the people to whom she belonged.

"That lady," said the female grenadier, pointing to Elizabeth, who stood in the porch watching them, "Lady Paulyn. It was Miss Disney told us to come here to look for her."

"Yes," said Hilda, who had alighted from the brougham, "and if you had been honest enough to tell me of Lady Paulyn's escape at the time it occurred, instead of three hours afterwards, I should have been here ever so long ago. I daresay you remem-

ber me, Mr. Forde," she added, turning to Malcolm. "I met you at luncheon one day at Hawleigh Vicarage. My name is Disney. I am Lord Pauly'n's cousin."

"I remember you perfectly, Miss Disney."

"I am sorry we should meet again under such lamentable circumstances. You have of course perceived poor Lady Pauly'n's sad condition? Has she been here long?"

"A little more than an hour, I should think. What made you suppose that she would come here?"

Hilda hesitated a little before replying.

"Because you are about the only person she knows in this neighbourhood."

"An isolated position for any woman to occupy," said Malcolm, "and I should imagine eminently calculated to depress the spirits or even to unsettle the mind."

"Lady Pauly'n had my society and her husband's, sir; and I do not believe solitude has had anything to do with the melancholy state of her mind."

"She has a strange aversion to returning to Slogh-na-Dyack," said Mr. Forde, "and a horror of her nurses, perhaps a natural feeling in her delirious state. Now, I have friends here; two simple-minded kindly old ladies who would be very glad to take charge of her for a few days. You might remain with her, if you pleased; and you could by that means withdraw her from a place about which she has such an unhappy feeling."

He did not want to give her up to them without a struggle, yet reason told him any struggle would be useless. Miss Disney's inflexible face, looking at him sternly in the moonlight, was not the face of a woman to be turned from her own set purpose by an appeal that might be made to her compassion.

"I could not possibly sanction such an extraordinary proceeding," she said. "Lord Pauly'n is away from home, and in his absence I feel myself responsible for his wife's safety. I cannot forgive the nurses for their shameful neglect this evening."

"There's no being up to the artfulness of 'em," said the tall nurse. "This evening was the first time the key of that door was ever out of my own keeping, owing to my having torn my pocket, and not liking to trust to it, I put that blessed key in a little chiny jar on the mantelpiece."

"Will you ask my cousin to come to the carriage, Mr. Forde?" said Miss Disney with a business-like air; "we need not lose any more time."

"You had better come into the house for a little while and talk to her quietly. There is no occasion to let her feel she is taken back like a prisoner."

Hilda complied rather unwillingly, and Mr. Forde led the way to the porch, where Elizabeth stood waiting the issue of events.

"You are not going to give me up, are you?" she asked.

"I have no power to detain you."

"Then you are a coward!" she cried passionately. "Is this what men have come to since the age of chivalry, when a man would leap among lions to pick up a woman's glove? You go among the heathen; you brave the rage of savages, their tortures, their poisoned arrows, their flames! Why, all that they say you have done can be nothing but lies, when you are afraid to oppose her," pointing contemptuously to Miss Disney.

"Elizabeth," he said earnestly, trying to pierce the confusion of her mind, "there are social laws stronger than fire or sword, and the law that gives a woman to her husband is the strongest of them all, for it is a divine law as well as a social one. I dare not come between you and those who have the best right to protect you. But I can interfere to redress your wrongs if they are false to their trust. I do not stand by unconcerned in this matter. Wherever you are, at Slogh-na-Dyaçk as well as in this house, I shall be interested in your welfare; at hand to give you all the help I can give, counsel and consolation as a minister of God's word, or advice as a man of the world. I have telegraphed to your sisters and your aunt, and I feel little doubt they will be with you to-morrow night."

"A most uncalled-for interference," said Hilda disdainfully. "The doctors have forbidden any intercourse between Lady Panlyn and her relations."

"What, do the doctors choose the time when she has most need of familiar friends and old associations to cut her off from them altogether? Wise doctors, Miss Disney! Common sense and natural affection suggest a better system of cure for a mind ill at ease."

"You may pretend to know more than scientific men who have made this malady the study of their lives," replied Hilda; "but however that may be, I can only tell you that should the Miss Luttrells be so foolish as to come to Lord Panlyn's house uninvited by him, they will not be allowed to see their sister."

"We will see about that when they are here."

Elizabeth stood between them silently. A vacant look had stolen over the pale melancholy face. She uttered no farther remonstrance, no farther upbraiding, but went with Hilda unresistingly, apathetic, or half unconscious where she was being taken. The fitful flame had died out into darkness. She was a creature without a mind; submissive, indifferent; to awaken by and by to a sense of her imprisonment and to vain anger and fury, like a wild animal that has been netted while it slept.

CHAPTER XI.

“ No joy from favourable fortune
Can outweigh the anguish of this stroke.”

THE night that followed was the darkest Malcolm Forde had ever known till now, darker even than that which followed Alice Fraser's death; for are not the dead that are already dead better than the living that are yet alive? And to the believer death has no positive horror; it is only the anguish of separation; a human sorrow; a human longing; a sharp pain, tempered always by that divine hope which makes this earthly life verily a pilgrimage leading to fair worlds beyond it.

But this death in life called madness—this living death, which may endure for the length of the longest life—is more bitter than the coffin and the grave. To know her miserable and helpless in the hands of people she feared—linked to a husband she had never even pretended to love—was to know her in a state as much worse than death as waking agony is worse than dreamless sleep. Never until this hour, when he looked round his empty room, the vacant chair where she had sat, the expiring fire into which those lovely eyes had gazed with their far-off dreaming look—never until now had he fully realised how he loved her; how little the life he had lived and the work he had done in five long years had served to divide him from her; how near and dear she was to him still.

Sleep, or even the semblance of rest, the miserable pretence of going to bed, was impossible to him that night. He walked down to Slogh-na-Dyack, down to the little bay where the troubled waters broke against the shore with a dismal moaning, where the reflection of the moon was blotted out every now and then by black wind-driven clouds. It was a dreary night, bleak and wintry; not a favourable season for midnight wanderings, or patient vigil beneath the window of a beloved sleeper; yet Malcolm Forde paced the narrow strip of beach below Lord Pauly'n's garden; a strip that was covered at high tide, until the morning gray. That patient watch might be useless—was useless no doubt—but it was all that he could do; the sole service he could render to the woman he loved. He saw the lighted windows on the chief upper floor—lights that never waned through the weary night—and he felt very sure they belonged to the rooms inhabited by Elizabeth. Had a cry of anguish broken from those dear lips, it must have pierced the stillness

of the night when the wind was low, and reached him on his beat. Sometimes, when the shrill blast shrieked in the mountain gorge upon the opposite shore, he almost fancied the sound of human anguish was mixed with the voice of the wind. It was a sad unsatisfactory vigil; but it was better to be there, beneath her windows, than to be lying sleepless miles away, beyond reach of her loudest cry. When day came, and the first gray threads of smoke crept up from the gothic chimneys, he went round to the chief entrance, rang the bell, and inquired of the sleepy housemaid who answered it if Lady Paulyn had passed a quiet night.

"Ask the head nurse," he said, as the girl stared at him vaguely, "and then come back and tell me exactly what she says," emphasising his request with a donation.

The girl departed, and returned quickly enough.

"Much the same as usual, sir, Nurse Barber says, and would you please leave your name?"

"Give that to Miss Disney," he said, handing the girl his card, on which he had written the date, and 7 A.M. He wanted Hilda to know that he was vigilant, and was not to be deterred from watchfulness by any fear of slander or of Lord Paulyn's displeasure.

This done, he went back to Dunallen, went back to the early service in the chapel, and to another day's work in the quiet little parish where he had made himself beloved. There was nothing more for him to do, he thought, than to wait till the arrival of the fast train from the South, which would not reach the station at Ellensbridge till half-past nine o'clock at night, even if it were punctual; an event not always to be counted as a certainty on a Scotch railway.

He found two telegrams on his study-table when he went back to the manse after his morning's work. The first from Gertrude, "I leave Hawleigh at 9 A.M. to-day, Thursday, and shall leave London for Ellensbridge by the limited mail." The second, a vague and helpless message from Mrs. Chevenix, entreating for detailed information, and pleading indifferent health as a reason for not coming to Scotland, if such a journey might possibly be avoided. Mrs. Chevenix had squandered three-and-sixpence worth of telegraphic communication in the endeavour to represent herself ardently desirous of flying to her beloved niece's sick-bed, yet unhappily obliged to remain in Eaton-place-south.

Not till to-morrow therefore could Elizabeth's sad eyes be gladdened by the sight of a familiar face, not till to-morrow could sisterly arms enfold that poor sufferer. For many hours to come Malcolm Forde must be content to leave her to the tender mercy of hired nurses and Hilda Disney. He could do nothing for her

except pray, and all his thoughts in this bitter time were prayers for her.

The railway to Ellensbridge was only a loop line, and that stern adherence to the hours set down in time-tables which is demanded by southern passengers on main lines was here unknown. If a train came in an hour or so after time, no one wondered. Railway officials placidly remarked that "she was jost a wee bittie late the dee," and that was all. Passengers herded meekly together on the narrow platform and gazed up and down the line, and saw other trains arrive and depart—trains that seemed to have no place in the time-table—or watched the leisurely shunting of a string of coal-trucks, and made no murmur. The marvel would have been if a train at Ellensbridge had ever come up to time.

Mr. Forde paced the platform with infinite impatience when the hour had gone by at which the train with passengers from the South should have arrived, waiting for the signal that should announce Gertrude Luttrell's coming. There was nothing doing at the station just at this time; even the string of empty coal-trucks stood idle, an unemployed engine on a siding puffed and snorted lazily, while the stoker off duty amused himself with the gymnastics of a disreputable-looking monkey. The day was wet and depressing; that fine straight rain, which to the impatient tourist appears sometimes to be the normal atmosphere of Scotland, filled the air; the kind of day in which Cockney travellers in the Trosachs stare hopelessly at Benvenue, looming big through the gray mist, and think they might almost as well be looking at the dome of St. Paul's from Blackfriars Bridge.

The train came slowly in at last, serenely unconscious of being three-quarters of an hour behind time, a diminutive train of two carriages and an engine; and out of one of the carriages Gertrude Luttrell looked with a pale anxious face, a face which sent a thrill of pain through the heart of Malcolm Forde, for it seemed to him that in this wan and faded countenance he saw a likeness of that altered beauty he had looked upon a little while ago.

"What is the matter with my sister?" she asked nervously, directly she was on the platform. "O, Mr. Forde, am I too late? Is——"

She stopped, and burst into tears. He led her into the little waiting-room, and reassured her there was no immediate danger.

"Thank God!" she cried, with a strange fervour. "O, Mr. Forde, it seems like a dream, seeing you here in this strange place; it seems like a dream to be here myself. I came without loss of an hour; I couldn't do any more than that, could I?"

Elizabeth has not been a good sister to me, or indeed to any of us. Her prosperity has made very little difference to us; we went on living our old dull life just the same after her marriage, and she did hardly anything to brighten it. Even long ago, before you came to Hawleigh, she was always cold and unloving towards me, sneered at my humble efforts to do right, set herself up against me in the strength of her beauty."

"It is hardly a time for complaints of this kind," said Mr. Forde, with grave displeasure. "Your sister is in great trouble."

"Have I not come? Am I not here to be with her? O, why are you always so hard upon me, Mr. Forde? Just the same after all these years. I would do anything in the world for her. It is not my fault if her married life is unhappy."

"Do not let us waste time in purposeless talk. I have a carriage ready to take you to your sister's house. I will tell you everything on the way."

In the carriage he told her the real nature of her sister's illness, the ruin that had befallen that bright reckless mind; told her his hope of speedy cure in a case where there was no hereditary taint, no shattered constitution, only the fever and confusion of a mind ill at ease, a soul seeking peace where there was no peace. He told her of his confidence in the happy influence of a familiar presence, of old associations, sisterly affection.

Gertrude was inexpressibly shocked; a curious stillness crept over her; she left off making vague attempts to explain her own conduct in relation to her sister, which had never been called into question by Mr. Forde; ceased to make little sidelong attacks upon Elizabeth; but became mute, with the aspect of one upon whom a heavy blow has fallen. Only when they were near Slogh-na-Dyack did she speak.

"Can you say with confidence that you believe she will recover?" she asked; "that you do not think she will be—mad—all her life?"

"I can say nothing of the kind," he answered sadly. "I can only say that I try to put my trust in God throughout this trial, as in others that have gone before it. But this seems harder than the rest."

They were at Slogh-na-Dyack by this time; but here bitter disappointment, a disappointment near akin to despair, awaited them, for upon Gertrude announcing herself as Lady Paulyn's sister, and requesting to be taken straight to the invalid's apartments, a vacant-looking flat-faced footman informed her that her ladyship had left Slogh-na-Dyack for the South just four-and-twenty hours ago.

"What!" cried Mr. Forde, who was standing on the thresh-

hold of the door, while Gertrude stood a little way within, staring helplessly at the blank face of the footman. "Do you mean to tell me that Lady Paulyn was allowed to travel in her state of health?"

"Yes, sir. The London doctor and one of the nurses went with her."

"They went with her, but where?"

"To London, I believe, sir. As far as I could make out from what was said."

"Where is Miss Disney? Let me see Miss Disney."

"Miss Disney have left also, sir."

"Then let me see some one who can tell me what all this means. This lady is your mistress's sister, who has travelled five hundred miles to see her, only to be told that she is gone, no one knows where. Is there any one else in the house who can explain this business?"

The footman shook his head despondingly.

"There's Colter the butler, sir," he said; "he might know something, and there's my lady's own maid."

"Let me see her," exclaimed Mr. Forde; whereupon the footman, always with a despondent air, ushered them into the library, a darksome but splendid apartment, which the Glasgow manufacturer had furnished with antique carved shelves for books that had never been supplied, a room in which literature was represented by a waste-paper basket, a what-not crammed with stale newspapers, a *Ruff's Guide, Post and Paddock*, and three or four numbers of *Baily's Magazine*.

Here Malcolm Forde paced to and fro, his soul shaken to its lowest deep, while Gertrude sat in a huge arm-chair, and cried feebly. What had they done with Elizabeth? What sinister motive had they in this sudden flight? What had they done with the helpless creature who had come to him for refuge, casting herself upon his pity, entreating with heart-piercing accents for shelter and protection? And he had refused to shelter her. The fear of injuring her in the sight of the world, or of widening the breach between her and her husband, had been stronger with him than love and pity; the anxious desire to do his duty had triumphed over the voice of his heart, which had said, "Claim a brother's right to protect her in her affliction, and defy the world."

He had done that which he had deemed the only thing possible for him to do. He had summoned her nearest of kin, the sister who had a right to be by her side at such a time, even in defiance of a husband. He had done this, and behold! it was as if he had done nothing for her. Where had they taken her—on what dismal journey had she gone—with a nurse and a doctor? His heart sank as he brooded upon that question.

There was only one answer that presented itself—an answer that was horrible to think of.

The door was opened after some delay by Mr. Colter, the butler, who had been enjoying the morning in a dressing-gown-and-slipper condition, loitering over a late breakfast and making the most of the family's absence, and had just made a hasty toilet in order to come to the front and see what was meant by Miss Luttrell's unlooked-for appearance on the scene. Behind him came a young woman with a nervous air, and eyelids that were reddened with weeping.

"This young person is Lady Paulyn's maid, Sarah Todd," said the butler blandly. "I have sent for her to see you, sir, as I was informed you had expressed a wish to that effect. But there is no information she can give you about my lady as I don't know as well as her. I'm sorry you should have made such a long journey for nothink, ma'am," he added, turning to Miss Luttrell, "but if you'd wrote, or telegraphed, the trouble might have been avided."

"I want to know all about this business, sir," said Malcolm Forde with his sternest air. "At whose bidding and in whose custody was Lady Paulyn removed from this house?"

"By the horder of her medical adviser, sir, and under his protection, with a nurse halso in attendance upon her."

"Indced! Then Lord Paulyn was not with his wife?"

"No, sir. My lord is in Invernesshire."

"What! Then it was in his absence Lady Paulyn was removed?"

"Certingly, sir—which the removal of her ladyship had been arranged before his lordship left this house. It was his lordship's wish to be away at the time—with a natural delickisy of feeling."

"Where has Lady Paulyn been taken? To her house in Park-lane?"

"No, sir."

Here Sarah Todd, the maid, dissolved into tears; at which the butler stared sternly at her, informing her that the lady and gentleman wanted none of her snivelling.

"Pray do not scold her," said Mr. Forde. "I am glad to see that she can feel for her mistress. And now perhaps you will be good enough to tell me where Lady Paulyn has been taken—if not to her town house?"

"That, sir, is a question which I do not feel myself at liberty to hanswer."

"You need not stand upon punctilio. You can waive the natural delicacy of mind which you no doubt share with your master. I can guess the worst you can tell me. Lady Paulyn has been taken to a private madhouse."

"I believe, sir, it is somethink in the way of an asylum. Strictly private, of course, and everythink upon the footing of a gentleman's 'ouse," replied the butler, softening, with a view to a possible donation, slipped unobtrusively into his palm presently, when he was escorting these visitors back to their carriage.

"Can you give me the exact address of the house?"

"No, sir. Everythink was kep extraordinary close. I heard it was somewheres near London. Even the nurse didn't know where she was gone."

"One of the nurses went with Lady Paulyn, you say? Which was she—the tall woman?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what became of the other?"

"She left by the same train, sir, to go back to her own home."

"Do you know *her* address?"

"No, sir."

"Nor you?" turning to the maid.

"No, sir. But she came from an institution somewhere near the Strand. You might hear of her perhaps there."

"Will you oblige me by writing down the names of both nurses on a slip of paper?" said Mr. Forde.

There were an inkstand and portfolio on the table, and the girl sat down immediately and wrote two names in a neat school-girl hand.

"Mrs. Barber, that's the tall nurse who went with Lady Paulyn, sir. Mrs. Gurbage, that's the one who went home."

"Thanks. I must try to find Mrs. Gurbage. And now tell this lady all you can. I'll leave you with her for a few minutes while I talk to Mr. Colter in the hall. Tell her how Lady Paulyn was when she left this place."

The girl shook her head sorrowfully. "There's very little I can tell, sir, though I loved my lady dearly, for she was always a dear good mistress to me. A little hasty sometimes, but O, so generous and kind. But from the time she began to be so ill they wouldn't let me go near her, though I know she used to ask for me, for I've stood outside her door sometimes for half-an-hour at a time and listened and heard her call me, and then cry so pitifully, 'Let me have some one with me that I know—for God's sake send me some one I know!'"

The girl remained with Miss Luttrell, while Mr. Forde and the butler went out into the hall and waited for them. But there was little more to be extracted either from man or maid.

They only knew that after the fever Lady Paulyn had gone out of her mind. She had suffered an attack of the same kind after her baby's death—only not so severe an attack. The

doctors had come backwards and forwards, and it had ended by her ladyship being removed under the care of one of them—whose very name the butler had never heard.

“Everythink was kep so close,” he repeated; “and it would have been as much as our places were worth to show any curiosity.”

Thus, after a little while, they left Slogh-na-Dyack in darkest ignorance, and Mr. Forde took Miss Luttrell to the manse, to give her rest and refreshment before their next move, which must be to London.

The woman he loved better than all things else in this lower world was hidden away from him in a madhouse. Hard trial of his faith, who had made duty his rule of life. If he had followed the dictates of his heart that night, he might have found her some safe refuge—might have saved her from this living grave. With a bitter pang he recalled that last contemptuous look which she had flung him when she accused him of cowardice.

CHAPTER XII.

“That was my true love’s voice. Where is he? I heard him call. I am free! Nobody shall hinder me. I will fly to his neck, and lie on his bosom. He called Margaret! He stood upon the threshold. In the midst—through the howling and chattering of hell—through the grim, devilish scoffing—I knew the sweet, the loving tone again.”

A SPACIOUS old-fashioned mansion north of London, among the green byroads between Barnet and Watford; a noble old house, red brick, of the Anne period, with centre and wings making three sides of a quadrangle; a stately old house, lying remote from the high-road, and surrounded by pleasure-grounds and park—the latter somewhat flat and dreary, but on a high level, with glimpses of a fine landscape here and there through a break in the wood. The house had belonged to a law-lord of the Augustan age of good Queen Anne; a once famous law-lord, whose portrait in wig and state-ropes looked down from the panelled walls, and with divers other effigies of his wife and children went among the fixtures of the house, and was flung into the bargain on very easy terms, among crystal chandeliers, antique fenders and fire-irons, shutter-bells, and other conveni-

ences of a bygone age. From the law-lord the mansion had descended to a wholesale grocer of the Sir-Baalam type, who thought "two puddings" luxuries, and rolled ponderously to Mincing-lane every day in his glass coach. Then came an Anglo-Indian colonel, enriched by the plunder of silver-gated cities and Brahminical temples, who held high-jinks in the old house, and ended by throwing himself from an upper window in a fit of delirium tremens. This helped to give the house a bad name, and together with its curiously isolated position, remote from all modes of conveyance—an extreme inconvenience in an age when everybody requires to be conveyed—tended to depress its market value; whereupon it was bought a dead bargain by a speculative solicitor, who tried to let it for some years without success, during which period the inhabitants of Hetheridge, a little village half a mile distant, were confirmed in their conviction that Hetheridge Hall, the mansion in question, was the favourite resort of

"Hags, ghosts, and sprites
That haunts the night."

In due time, however, the place came under the notice of Dr. Cameron, who, as his patients increased in number, required a larger mansion than that in which his father had begun business, and who, finding in Hetheridge and its hall a situation and an abode at once eligible and inexpensive, made haste to secure house and grounds on a long lease, getting the portraits of the law-lord and his olive-branches flung in for an old song, as well as grounds furnished with some of the finest specimens of the fir tribe in the county of Herts.

So the noble music-room, where the bewigged and bepowdered family of the law-lord smirked and simpered on the panelled walls, and where the law-lord himself had entertained the élite of the country-side with stately old-fashioned hospitality, was now given up to the weekly junketings of ladies and gentlemen of more or less disordered intellect; ladies upon whose head-gear, and gentlemen upon whose collars and cravats, eccentricity had set its seal. Here once a week throughout the slow long winter the doctor's patients pranced and capered through First Sets and Lancers and Caledonians; while the younger and more fashionable among them even essayed round dances. Here, in full view of those stately effigies of the patch-and-powder period, mild refreshment in the way of white-wine negus and raspberry-jam tarts was dispensed between nine o'clock and ten; when the junketers dispersed more or less unwillingly to their several chambers, under close guard of nurses and keepers, who drove them along passages and up staircases like a flock of sheep.

The traveller, lingering a few moments by the park fence to look down the long straight avenue at the grim red façade of Hetheridge Hall, was apt, knowing the story of the place, to fancy dire scenes of horror within those solid old walls: secret dungeon chambers underground, in which wretched creatures, forgotten by all the world except one brutal guardian, languished in sempiternal darkness, chained to a damp black wall, against which the slimy rats pushed noiselessly to fight for the madman's scanty meal; dreary windowless rooms in the heart of the house, approached by secret passages known of but by a few, where pale white-haired women pined in a lifelong silence. But there were neither *robora* nor *piombi* in Dr. Cameron's prosperous and comfortable establishment; and the only horrors within that melancholy mansion were the gloomy thoughts of those among its occupants who were not quite mad enough to be unconscious of their state; or the black despair of those in whom madness was a thing of violence and terror, a ceaseless fever of the brain, like a caldron for ever at boiling-point, full of fancies grim and loathsome as the constituents of a witch's hell-broth.

Happily for the doctor there was a good deal of comfortable easy-going lunacy in his establishment, patients who liked their dinner, and kept up their spirits by quarrelling with each other and reviling their nurses. Some of these custodians were amiable young women enough, and really kind to their charges; but there was another class of attendants who, finding life in an asylum rather a dull business, took it out of the patients, and acquired a diabolical skill in the administration of sly pinches and invisible squeezes in public; while in private their mode of remonstrance with a refractory or fretful patient took the more open form of bangs and kicks. Any bruises or abrasions resulting from this rough-and-ready style of argument were easily accounted for as having been self-inflicted by the patient, "poor thing."

The doctor was a man of considerable benevolence, who conducted his house on a liberal scale, gave his patients airy rooms, ample service, and good living; and only failed to secure them from the possibility of ill-usage for the simple reason that he was not ubiquitous. He did not live at Hetheridge, but drove down from the West-end once or twice a week in his brougham, saw a few particular cases, smiled his soothing smile upon the victims of mental delusion, dexterously fenced those strange direct questions which madness is apt to put to its guardian, walked through the public rooms, made a good many inquiries, looked about him in a general way, took a chop and a glass or two of dry sherry with his subordinate—the medical superintendent at Hetheridge—and then went back to his metropolitan practice, which was a large one.

In this strange abode Elizabeth awoke one morning from a long troubled dream of swift journeying through the land, bound like a captive in a corner of the railway carriage; for had she not resisted this transit, opposing her sudden removal from Slogh-na-Dyack with what little force she had? whereby the physician, kindly as his nature was, felt himself called upon to exercise his authority with a certain severity of aspect, and to treat Lady Paulyn as a naughty child requiring nursery discipline.

Darker than the darkest dream that ever visited the couch of fever was that rapid journey from north to south. The swiftness of the transit was in itself an agony to that enfeebled brain; the perpetual monotonous thump of the engine, like the throbbing of some giant heart beating itself to death; the ceaseless shifting of the landscape—moor and mountain, valley and wood flitting past behind the blinding rain, like shadows moving in a phantom world; all these things were torment to that distracted mind. No warning of the impending journey had been given to the patient, no hint of impending change in her mode of life; for doctors and nurses alike concurred in treating her as if she had been a sick child. From the hour in which hallucination set in, this infantine treatment had been religiously observed. The possibility of a bright intellect struggling in an agony of perplexed thought behind the dim clouds that obscured it was utterly ignored. Because the patient thought wrongly upon some points, she was set down at once as incapable of reasonable thought upon any point. Left in the dismal blankness of isolation—no friendly word whispered in her ear, no tidings of the outer world permitted to dispute the dominion of wild imaginings—her weakened brain had been wearied by perpetual wonder at her own state, and why she was thus cut off from all communion with her kind.

On the morning of the journey she had been dressed like a child who is taken for an airing, her travelling dress hustled upon her by the nurse's impatient hands, dragged down the stairs against her will—protesting vehemently, in wildest despair, as if moved by some prophetic sense of impending doom. Then came a dream-like apathy, in which thought was not, only the acute agony of shattered nerves.

For some time after her arrival at Hetheridge Park, Lady Paulyn was pronounced unfit for the social circle, as there represented by a small assemblage of ladies and gentlemen of various habits and opinions, whom the world, as represented by doctors and commissioners of lunacy, had agreed in pronouncing of unsound mind. They were not, on the whole, widely different from other ladies and gentlemen, nor did their lunacy exhibit those salient points which afforded material for the pen of a

Warren or a Gilbert; in fact, they did little to distinguish themselves from the vulgar herd of the sane.

They were a shade more disagreeable than the outside world, or exhibited their various ill-temper more freely; grumbled a great deal upon every possible subject, and each pursued his or her line of thought without reference to external circumstances, with a harmless egotism not uncommon even in the outer world.

But to these specimens of the later stage of Dr. Cameron's process, which were in a manner the bedded-out plants of his collection, removed from the forcing-house or the hotbed of solitary confinement into the open, Lady Paulyn was not yet considered fit to be introduced. Such at least was the opinion of Dr. Cameron and the house-surgeon, who took their opinions from the nurses. Their own visits to Lady Paulyn's rooms only showed them a motionless figure in an arm-chair, with pale dejected face, and loosened hair tossed back from a weary-looking brow; a haggard face, and wild tearless eyes which gazed at them wonderingly out of a dream-world.

The system in this case was naturally the system usual in all other cases; what physician could chop and change his treatment to suit the idiosyncrasies of every new patient? The same smoothing smile which Dr. Cameron, like the sun which shines alike upon the just and the unjust, shed upon a crazy stockbroker whose mental balance had tottered in unison with his balance at his banker's, under the cumulative burden of contango, he shed also upon Lady Paulyn. The gentle gesture with which he smoothed the roughened locks of the wealthy grocer's wife, who had succumbed to a too devoted attention to the wine-and-spirit department of her husband's business, was the same touch, half patronising, half caressing, which he laid like a good man's blessing upon Elizabeth's fevered forehead. He had even a little sympathetic murmur, a faint humming, as of a benevolent bee, which he bestowed alike upon all first-class patients. He perhaps hummed a trifle less for the second-class boarders, but even for them he had kindly pitying smiles, but always as of a superior order of being, whose brain had been constructed upon quite another model, and was altogether a different kind of machine, not by any possibility to be disorganised.

Dr. Cameron, devoting five minutes twice a week or so to this very interesting case, was greeted by the patient only with a despairing silence and mute wondering looks from troubled eyes,—wonder at this period predominating over every other sensation—wonder why she was in that place; why he, Malcolm, had so utterly deserted her; why all her surroundings had undergone a change so sudden and complete that it seemed to her as if she was an infant newly born into a new world—

wonder which was mute, for when she tried to speak strange words came, and the power of language seemed to have left her, except in spasmodic outbursts of complaint, complaint addressed to the bare walls or to her adamantine nurses. Dr. Cameron seeing her in this state, and being duly informed by loquacious nurses that Lady Paulyn was violent and hysterical, began to think the chances of speedy cure more than doubtful. The patient talked to herself a great deal, her nurses told him, and obstinately refused to sleep, in which peculiar temper she was the worst subject they had ever had to deal with.

"We don't get wink of sleep for hours at a stretch," complained nurse Barber, of the grenadier aspect. "Talking to herself all night long, drumming with her fingers on the wall, and that restless! Turn and turn and toss and toss from side to side, and sigh and moan in a way that goes to your very marrow! I think for troublesomeness she's about the worst patient I ever laid eyes on."

"Does she ever speak of her husband now?" asked the doctor, inquiring for some token of awakening memory.

"Lord bless you, no, sir; and if we say anything about him, stands us out, up hill and down dale, that there's no such person, and that she never was married. Once when I mentioned his name, thinkin' as that might bring her to reason, she looked at me with a foolish smile, twisting and untwisting her hair round her fingers all the time, and said 'Poor Lord Paulyn! Yes, he was in love with me once, poor fellow! But that's all over. I was true to Malcolm.' As to the way she carries on about that Malcolm, it's downright wicked."

"So Dr. Cameron looked kindly at the troublesome patient, hummed and ha'd a little in his mild way, which meant that he could make nothing of her, murmured something professional to himself about cerebral disturbance, like a clock which strikes in an empty room from the mere habit of striking, and departed, knowing just as much about that curious mystery the human mind in this case as he knew in the case of the drunken grocer's wife, or the demented stockjobber, prescribing almost exactly the same treatment, with a little difference as to diet perhaps, since this was a more delicate organisation—Roussillon instead of bottled stout, the breast of a chicken instead of a rumpsteak—departed, and left Elizabeth in the utter darkness of a lonely room and in the power of the nurses she abhorred.

The lottery of nurses is not unlike that lottery to which some atrabillious misogynist has compared to marriage. It is like dipping for a single eel in a bag of snakes. Elizabeth's first draw had resulted in snakes. Her two nurses were first the grenadier woman, with the muscles of a gladiator, not a badly-disposed person perhaps, could one have arrived at the motive

principle of her nature, but using her enormous strength half unconsciously, and having a fixed opinion that physical force was the only treatment for a mind askew; secondly, a vain pretty girl, who enjoyed a flirtation with a keeper or gentlemanly lunatic on the high-road to recovery better than the solitude of the patient's chamber, who had adopted the position of madhouse nurse because it paid better than pleasanter modes of industry, and who wreaked her disgust for her calling upon the subject of her care. She was morally worse than the grenadier, heartless and shallow beyond all measure, and maliciously gratified at having a lady at her mercy.

Thus followed the long days and the longer nights; nights for the greater part utterly without sleep, long watches in the dim light of the night-lamp, watches through which all the imps and demons of madness held their horrid Sabbath in that one unresting brain; nights in which the patient's mind was like a rudderless ship driven thousands of miles out of her course, or like a star that has been loosed from its natural station in heaven to reel tempest-driven through infinite space. Who dare follow the thoughts of that distracted brain, the inextricable tangle of waking dreams and shreds of memory, going back to childhood's cloudiest recollections of a world that seemed sweeter than the world known in later years? Nor were those silent nights voiceless for her. Voices that she loved spoke to her from the corridor outside her door, only divided from her by that fatal locked door. Sometimes it was her mother's gentle half-plaintive tone, as of one who had always found life a thing to grumble at; sometimes her baby's tiny voice calling with his first broken word, the tender cry she had been so proud to hear; sometimes her father's genial tones; for in this long dream of madness death was not. But oftenest of all came the voice of Malcolm Forde. He was always near her, shielding and consoling her. There were nights when he would not speak, but she was not the less convinced of his presence. She knelt by that cruel door in the dead of the night—while the nurses, stretched grimly on their truckle-beds, kept guard over her as they slept—and laid her head against the panel, and felt that her loved ones were near her; felt as if their very breath shed a gentle warmth through the magnetic wood, and melted the ice at her heavy heart. She was as certain of their vicinity as she has ever been of any fact in her life. She never doubted, never questioned how they had come there, wondered at nothing except why she was separated from them, and this severance she came by and by to ascribe to the settled enmity of her nurses.

With the gray light of morning that dream would vanish, and give place to another fancy, or sometimes to a period of dull

apathy, an absolute blank, in which perhaps the brain rested after its nightly fever. She was quiet enough in the day, the nurses admitted to each other, whereby they contrived to steal various hours for their own amusements, gossip or flirtation as the case might be, while the patient sat alone and stared at the fire, whose dangerous properties were guarded by a large wire screen. Against this screen Elizabeth leant, and looked into the fire, which seemed the most sympathetic thing in her narrow world, and struck wild chords on the wires of the guard, and imagined the music that should have answered to her touch, and even played some simple melody of days gone by—"Vedrai carino," or "Voi che sapéte."

No one essayed to help her back to sense and memory. The doctors came and looked at her, and patted her on the head, and passed from before her sight like the shifting shadows of a magic-lantern, and had about as much meaning for her. No one tried to awaken her senses from their long dream with books or genial talk, with music, or pictures, or flowers, or any of these familiar things that might have touched the mystic chords of memory. There was a certain routine for all patients at Hetheridge Hall, where madness was cured, or taken care of, upon a wholesale system, not admitting of minute differences. A comfortable open carriage was maintained for the use of the first-class patients, and these, when pronounced well enough for such indulgence, were allowed to commune with nature daily during an hour's drive, generally on the same turnpike-road. A glimpse of the outer world which raised strange vague longings in some distracted minds, whilst for other more sluggish spirits the wide wintry landscape and the distant dome of St. Paul's, seen dimly athwart a blue-gray cloud, seemed no more than a picture flashed before their troubled eyes—a picture of fields and hedgerows and sky and cloud dimly remembered in some former stage of existence.

During the first six weeks of her residence at Hetheridge—time of which the patient herself kept no count, but which seemed rather a vast blank interval, a dismal pause wherein life came to a standstill, than so many days and nights—Lady Paulyn was pronounced too weak for out-of-door exercise of any kind whatever, and in this period she scarcely saw the sky. It was there certainly—the blue vault of heaven—visible from the upper part of her window, the lower half being kept closely shuttered lest she should do herself a mischief; for Nurse Barber remembered and dwelt upon that little episode at Slogh-na-Dyack when she had sought to force herself out of the window. The sky was there, within reach of her dull eyes, and she did not look up at it. Her brain was a medley of old thoughts, a chaos of many-coloured scraps and shreds, like a

good housekeeper's rag-bag. All her married life—with its social triumphs, its unbroken brilliancy, its splendour and extravagance—was as if it had never been; and young memories, childish fancies, and the days when her first and only love ripened into passion, usurped her mind. Madness, which in its worst folly has a curious tendency to hit upon universal truths, revealed the unquenchable power of a first poetic love—a love which, pure as the vestal's sacred fire, burns with its quiet light through all the storms of life, and grows brighter as the pilgrim's path descends the valley where the shadows thicken on the border-land of life and death.

CHAPTER XIII.

“Hast thou no care of me? Shall I abide
In this dull world, which in thy absence is
No better than a sty?”

TONGATABOO and Taheiti—or the Tongataboo and Taheiti of the day—had to wait the return of their pastor. Savage chieftains, holding council in the domestic seclusion of their matting with their wives and families, could but lament the absence of that white-skinned teacher whom at his first coming they had been disposed to treat as a god. That autumn-tide did not see Malcolm Forde's return to the South-Sea Islands. For a little while, at least, even duty must be in abeyance, his place must wait for him. The society for which he had worked knew him well enough to know that he was thoroughly in earnest—that he would return in due time, and complete the labour he had begun, and widen the area of his labours, and faint not until Death should say to him, “Thus far, and no farther, shalt thou journey, O pilgrim and messenger!”

Meanwhile he stayed in England to do something very near his heart, to watch and pray for the woman he loved, and whom, as it seemed, all the world except himself had abandoned to bitterest fate. But for him Gertrude Luttrell would have yielded helplessly, nervelessly, almost placidly to the force of circumstances—would have meekly accepted the fact that her sister had been transferred to a lunatic asylum as a melancholy necessity, against which there could be no appeal,

beyond which there could be but the smallest margin for hope.

But Malcolme Ford was not inclined to take things so patiently. He came straightway to London with Miss Luttrell, saw Mrs. Chevenix, whose malady—chronic neuralgia—seemed hardly so severe or tangible an affliction as to justify her refusal to come to her niece's rescue, and who, in this sad crisis of her favourite niece's life, had little help of any kind to offer, and seemed chiefly tormented by a melancholy foreboding, that *it*, meaning Elizabeth's madness, would get into the papers.

"Everything does get into the papers sooner or later," she said despondently. "I'm sure there's no such thing as the sanctity of private life for people of position. I shall never take up my *Morning Post* without a shudder from this time forward."

"Had we not better think of how we are to save your niece from the anguish of her present situation rather than of keeping the fact out of the *Morning Post*?" said Mr. Forde. "It might be necessary even for us to appeal to the Press for help, if we found no other way of rescuing her."

"O Mr. Forde!" moaned Mrs. Chevenix, applying herself mechanically to her scent-bottle; "don't pray talk about the anguish of her situation. We have no reason to suppose that she is unhappy. With my nephew Lord Paulyn's splendid income she would, of course, be sure of the very highest form of treatment; every advantage which wealth could provide."

"We will take that for granted, if you like. But she is in the hands of strangers, and even her sister does not know where or with whom. The fitful fever of the brain which succeeded fever of the body has been set down as madness, and in that state of mental exaltation—every sense intensified, her capacity for suffering increased twentyfold—she has been handed over to strangers, whose interests will be best served by her permanent estrangement. Say that they are conscientious and will do their best to cure her, will the best they can do counterbalance the horror of that sudden removal to an entirely strange place, and the banishment of every human creature and every object with which she was familiar? Is not such a shock eminently calculated to turn temporary hallucination into life-long madness? I am almost distracted when I think of what has been done!" cried Malcolm, starting from his chair, and pacing the Eaton-place drawing-room—the room which seemed destined only to witness his misery.

Mrs. Chevenix sighed, and again sought relief from the scent-bottle, first from one end and then the other, as if in aromatic vinegar there might lurk a virtue that was not in sal volatile.

“The first thing to be done,” said Malcolm, coming to a standstill by the writing-table, at which Gertrude sat helpless, those perpetual tears standing in her eyes—she had done nothing but shed those two slow languid tears since she left Slogh-na-Dyack, as if, having produced these silent evidences of feeling, she had done her duty to her sister,—“the first thing to be done is for Miss Luttrell to write to Lord Paulyn, requesting to be immediately informed of the place to which her sister has been taken, and the people to whom she has been intrusted. You had better write the letter in duplicate, Miss Luttrell, and address one copy to Park-lane, and the other to Slogh-na-Dyack.”

Miss Luttrell endeavoured to obey, with a sheep-like meekness, but finding her absolutely incapable of framing a sentence, Mr. Forde himself dictated the letter, which was brief and decisive, ending with the formal request, “Be good enough to telegraph an immediate reply.”

It was also at Mr. Forde’s suggestion that Miss Luttrell took up her abode in her aunt’s house until such time as she should be better informed about her sister’s fate.

Having done this, and feeling, with supreme pain, that there was little more he could do, Mr. Forde went to his solicitor in Lincoln’s-inn-fields, and took counsel with him upon the legal aspect of Lady Paulyn’s position. The lawyer’s opinion was not particularly cheering. Elizabeth’s husband was her natural guardian. With the sanction of the Commissioners in Lunacy, he could place her in whatever licensed establishment he pleased. Her sisters and her aunt counted for very little in her life.

No reply to Gertrude’s letter came in the shape of a telegram; but three days after the letter had been sent—days of intolerable length for Malcolm Forde—there came a curt scrawl from the Viscount, informing his “Dear Miss Luttrell” that Lady Paulyn had been placed in the care of Dr. Cameron, of Chesterfield-row, and Hetheridge Hall, Herts; that it was quite impossible she could be in better hands; and that, having already suffered so much trouble and annoyance from this unhappy event, he must request that no further letters might be addressed to him upon the subject. He was on the point of starting for Rome, where he meant to winter; his native country having become obnoxious to him. The letter was full of his lordship’s personal grievance, and contained not one affectionate or compassionate allusion to his wife.

It contained, however, all that Malcolm Forde wanted to know, the name of the doctor and the madhouse.

He made Gertrude accompany him to Chesterfield-row within half-an-hour of the receipt of the letter. He had taken up his quarters for a few days with an old friend in Cadogan-place, in

der to be within five minutes' walk of Mrs. Chevenix's house, and had stipulated that a messenger should bring him immediate tidings of Lord Paulyn's reply. Thus it was that so little time was lost between the arrival of the letter and their interview with Lady Paulyn's physician.

Dr. Cameron was kindness itself; smiled his sweet smile upon Gertrude and her clerical friend; pledged himself to do all that he could do, in reason.

"But really what you ask for, Mr.—Mr. Forde," with a glance at the cards that had been sent in to him, "is quite out of the question. I can perfectly understand Miss Luttrell's natural desire to see her sister. But an interview, in the present stage of affairs, is simply impossible."

"Yet is it not just possible, Dr. Cameron, that the sight of some one whom she has known and loved all her life—a familiar home-face, bringing back old memories—might strike a chord——"

"My dear sir," exclaimed the doctor in his blandest way, "that is the very thing we want to avoid; there must be no chords struck yet awhile, the instrument is not strong enough to bear the shock. It is all very well on the stage or in a novel; we are told to believe that a favourite melody is played, a familiar face is seen, and the patient gives a shriek, and recovers his senses in a moment upon the spot. My dear sir, there is no such thing possible. Mental aberration, without positive change in the condition of the brain, is a thing of the rarest occurrence. We have to cure the brain, which we can neither see nor handle, just as we set a broken arm, which we can do what we like with. And the first and most essential step towards recovery is repose, absolute rest. You will understand, therefore, my dear Miss Luttrell, why I am compelled to forbid any intrusion upon the tranquil solitude in which our dear patient is now placed."

"How soon may I see her?" asked Gertrude.

"That is a question beyond my power to answer. All must depend upon her progress towards recovery. If she recovers, which I trust, which I may venture to say I believe, she ultimately will, I shall be happy to let you see her directly I find her mind strong enough to bear the emotion that must be caused by such a meeting. I will not ask you to wait till she is really well, for that naturally will be an affair of time, and at the best rather a long time; but as soon as the brain begins to regain its balance, concurrently with the return of bodily strength, you shall be allowed to see her. Lord Paulyn, who is naturally as anxious as yourself, has resigned himself to the inevitable, and submits to my judgment in this sad affair."

"He is so far resigned," said Mr. Forde with some touch of bitterness, "that he contemplates going abroad, and putting the Channel between himself and his afflicted wife."

"A step I myself recommended," replied Dr. Cameron. "Lord Paulyn has been rather severely shaken by this business, and as he is of an excitable temperament, the consequences to himself might not be without peril."

The conversation lasted some time longer. Mr. Forde was not easily satisfied. He tried to obtain some definite expression of the physician's opinion. But physicians are not given to definite opinions. Dr. Cameron see-sawed the matter in his most delicate way, said all that was kind about Lady Paulyn, persuaded Miss Luttrell that the best thing she could possibly do would be to go back to Devonshire, and there quietly wait for tidings of her sister's recovery, and then politely dismissed his visitors, who had really usurped a good deal of his valuable morning, while patients with their fees neatly papered in their waistcoat-pockets were yawning over a three-weeks-old *Illustrated London News*, or a year-old *Quarterly*.

Gertrude left Chesterfield-row sorely dejected in mind, and disposed to take the doctor's advice, and go straight back to the little house in the Boroughbridge-road, where bright fenders and fire-irons and polished tables would be going to rack and ruin in the absence of her supervising eye. She, of old so strong-minded, seemed to have become the weakest and most helpless of womankind.

"It isn't as if I could be any good to Elizabeth," she said. "If I could help her in any way I shouldn't care what sacrifices I made. But Dr. Cameron says I may have to wait for months before he can let me see her, and what will become of the house all that time, with only Diana and Blanche, who have no more idea of looking after things than if they were infants? We shall all be ruined if I don't go back soon."

"And when you are gone back, if your sister were dying, and Dr. Cameron at the last moment awoke to the idea that she should have some one near her whom she had loved, you will be in Devonshire—too far to be summoned in time to be of any use."

"But she is not going to die," cried Gertrude, with a frightened look; "Dr. Cameron said nothing about her dying."

"Not directly; but he said she was in a very weak state of health, and a physician seldom says quite all he means. I have seen her, remember, and the change I saw in her was enough to put sad forebodings into my mind. O God, to think of her alone in a madhouse," he cried, with a little burst of passion, "the brightest creature that ever lived upon this earth!"

"But they will take the utmost care of her," said Gertrude tremulously, and with a faint pang of envy, envying Elizabeth even now because Malcolm Forde had loved her, still loved her,

perhaps, for was not this keen anxiety more than simple Christian charity? "Dr. Cameron told us that; and she will have every comfort—every luxury—a carriage at her disposal when she is well enough to use it."

"Every comfort—every luxury! Do you think your sister cares for comforts and luxuries in a prison? Her proud free-spirit might have found happiness on a desert island. Bondage has strangled it—the bondage of a fatal marriage—and now the bondage of a madhouse. Gertrude, when I think of the past I am almost mad. If I had not been the proudest fool that ever lived, all this might have been prevented. My darling," he murmured softly, "that bright mind should never have gone astray had I had the keeping of it."

He grew calmer presently, and discussed things quietly with Gertrude, who, shamed out of her small worldliness by his deeper feeling, agreed to remain in Eaton-place so long as aunt Chevenix would shelter her there; or, if need were, to take a modest lodging nearer her sister's prison-house, and to let fenders, fire-irons, and even the family tea-kettle, enfolded in baize and cunningly secreted under the best bed, take care of themselves.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Did I speak once angrily, all the drear days
You lived, you woman I loved so well,
Who married the other? Blame or praise,
Where was the use then? Time would tell,
And the end declare what man for you,
What woman for me, was the choice of God."

THROUGH the dull days of November, into the dreary mid-winter, Malcolm Forde lived in the little village of Hetheridge, and in his lonely walks every day, and often twice a day, beheld the walls that shut Elizabeth from all the outer world. Christmas had come and gone—a strangely quiet Christmas—and he had not yet seen Dr. Cameron's patient, though he had been favoured with several brief interviews with the doctor, who had cheered him lately with the intelligence that all was going well; there had been lately decided signs of improvement; the patient had been allowed to mingle a little with the sanest among her

fellow-patients, had assisted at their little weekly dance, though that modest festival had not appeared to make much impression upon her; she had stared at the long lighted music-room and the people dancing in smartened morning-dress and various-coloured gloves wonderingly, and had asked if it were a servants' ball. But she had latterly been more amenable to reason; the nurses complained less of her violence; she had been taken for an airing in the grounds on fine days, and would go out in the carriage as soon as the weather grew a little milder. Altogether, the account was cheering, and Mr. Forde was fain to be satisfied, and to thank God for so much mercy in answer to his prayers.

He was not quite idle even at Hetheridge, but had made friends with the incumbent of the little rustic church and helped him with his duty, and made himself an awakening influence even in this narrow circle. He visited the poor, and catechised the children on Sunday afternoons, and very much lightened the burden of the perpetual curate of Hetheridge, who was an elderly man with a chronic asthma. This work, and long hours of quiet study deep into the winter's night, made his life tolerable to him—made it easy to wait and watch and hope for the hour of Elizabeth's recovery.

And when she would have recovered—what then?

Why, then she would go back to her husband, and to her old worldly life, most likely, and grow weary of it again. O, no, he would not believe this. He would hope that by God's blessing this dismal warning would not have been sent in vain, that she would begin an entirely new life, a life of unselfishness and good works, a life brightened by faith and prayer, a life which should be her apprenticeship to Christianity, her education for the world to come.

This was what he hoped for, this was the end to which he looked forward, after that blessed day when she should stand before him in her right mind.

This consummation seemed to be a little nearer by and by, when Dr. Cameron said, that if Miss Luttrell would procure a line from Lord Paulyn giving his consent to an interview with the patient, he, the doctor, would sanction such an interview in the course of the following week.

"Do you mean to say that it is necessary to obtain Lord Paulyn's consent before his afflicted wife can be allowed to see her own sister, her nearest surviving relative?" asked Malcolm, with a touch of indignation.

"Unquestionably, my dear sir," answered the doctor. "Lord Paulyn placed this dear lady in my care, and I have no right to permit her to see any one, even her nearest-of-kin, until I am certain of his approval. The bond between man and wife, my

dear sir—as I need hardly suggest to a gentleman of your sacred calling—is above all other ties.”

“Yes; and as interpreted by the common law of England is sometimes a curious bondage,” said Mr. Forde bitterly; “separating a woman from all that was dear to her in the past, encompassing her life with a boundary which no one shall cross—let her suffer what she may—except her sufferings assume that special shape which the makers of the divorce-law have taken into consideration. Thus, a man may break his wife’s heart, but must not break her bones, in the presence of witnesses.”

“Lord Paulyn has been a most devoted husband, I believe,” said Doctor Cameron, with a disapproving air.

“I have no reason to believe otherwise. Only it seems rather hard that your patient cannot see her sister without her husband’s permission. It is taking no account of all her past life. And there may be some delay in obtaining this consent, unless you can give Miss Luttrell her brother-in-law’s address.”

“Lord Paulyn was in Rome when I last heard from him,” replied Dr. Cameron, with an agreeable recollection of his lordship’s communication, which had been merely an envelope enclosing a cheque. “If it will save Miss Luttrell trouble, I shall be happy to write to him myself. Of course such an appeal to his wishes is a mere point of ceremony, but one which I feel myself bound to observe.”

“You are very good. Yes, if you will write I am sure Miss Luttrell will be obliged to you.”

It was settled therefore that Dr. Cameron should apply for the required permission, and Gertrude must await the answer to his letter, however tardily Lord Paulyn might reply.

The week spoken of by the physician came and went, and he acknowledged that his patient was now well enough to see her sister, but there was no answer from Rome.

The Viscount had gone elsewhere, perhaps, and the doctor’s letter was following by the slow foreign stages.

This delay seemed a hard thing to Malcolm Forde, almost harder to bear than the long period of doubt and fear, when at each new visit to the physician he had dreaded to hear the patient pronounced incurable. Now when God had given her back to them—for these first slow signs of improvement he accepted as the promise of speedy cure—man interposed with his petty forms and ceremonies, and said, “She shall languish alone; the slow dawn of sense shall show her nothing but strange faces; the first glimmer of awakening reason shall find her in loneliness and abandonment; the first thought her mind shall shape shall be to think herself forgotten by all her little world, put away from them like a leper, to live or die as God pleases, without their love or their help.”

It was in vain that he pleaded with Dr. Cameron.

"I would rather wait for the letter," the kind-hearted physician said in his mild gentlemanlike way. "A little delay will do no harm. The mind is certainly recovering its balance, and I hope great things from the return of mild weather. I have given Lady Paulyn new apartments—those small changes are sometimes beneficial—and a piano; the exciting tendency of music was a point to be avoided until now; and I have changed her nurses. Poor thing, she fancied the last were unkind; the merest delusion, as they were women of the highest character, and peculiarly skilled in their avocation."

Another week went by, and there was still no communication from Lord Paulyn. Dr. Cameron had written again, at Mr. Forde's earnest request, and Gertrude had also written, but there was no answer to either letter. Malcolm Forde paced the lonely road outside the fences of Hetheridge Park for hours together in the dull February afternoons, saw the firelight shining from the distant windows of the Hall, which looked a comfortable mansion as its many lattices shone out upon the wintry dusk; a mansion in which one could fancy happy home-like scenes; the patter of childish feet on polished oak staircases, fresh young voices singing old ballads in the gloaming; lovers snatching brief glimpses of Paradise in shadowy corridors, from the light touch of a little hand or the shy murmur of two rosy lips; all sweet things that wait upon youth and hope and love, instead of madmen's disjointed dreams, and the tramping to and fro of weary feet that know not whither they would go.

He could only watch and wait and hope and pray, pray that the return of reason might restore her to peace and a calmer loftier frame of mind than she had ever known yet. For his own part he had never even hinted a wish to see her. Indeed, he did hardly desire to see that too lovely face again, most lovely to him even in its decay. It would be enough for him to hear of her from Gertrude; enough for him to have secured her the consolation of a sister's companionship; and by and by, when she was restored to health and released from her captivity—a captivity which should not last an hour longer than was necessary, Dr. Cameron assured him—he could go back to his distant vineyard, with his soul at peace. In the meantime it was his duty to watch for her and care for her, as a brother might have done.

CHAPTER XV.

“Look on me! There is an order
Of mortals on the earth, who do become
Old in their youth, and die ere middle age,
Without the violence of warlike death;
Some perishing of pleasure—some of study—
Some worn with toil—some of mere weariness—
Some of disease—and some insanity—
And some of wither'd, or of broken hearts;
For this last is a malady which slays
More than are number'd in the lists of Fate,
Taking all shapes, and bearing many names.”

ELIZABETH was better. The time had come when she could shape her thoughts into words; when Dr. Cameron's kind face, smiling gently at her, had become something more than a picture; when it had ceased also to recall to her first one person, then another, faintly remembered among the hazy crowd of former acquaintance, the people she had known in the Park-lane period of her life. The time had come at last when she knew him as her custodian; though why he should be so, she knew not, nor yet the meaning of her imprisonment. But he seemed to her a person in authority, and to him she appealed against her nurses, telling him that they had been cruel to her, more cruel than words could speak, especially her words, poor soul! which came tremulously from the pale lips, and were apt to shape disjointed phrases. The nurses strenuously denied the truth of this accusation: whereupon Dr. Cameron gently shook his head, as who would say, “Poor soul, poor soul! we know how much significance to attach to her complaints; but we may as well humour her.” So Nurse Barber and Nurse Lucas were passed on to another patient in the preliminary and violent stage, and Lady Paulyn was now so fortunate as to be committed to the care of a soft-hearted low-voiced little woman who had none of the vices of the Gamp sisterhood. This change, and a change in her apartments to rooms with a southern aspect, looking out upon a flower-garden, produced a favourable effect. The patient began to sleep a little at night, awoke from wild dreams of the past, recognised the blank lonely present, and knew that she was severed from all she had ever loved; knew that her dead were verily dead, and that the voices she had heard in all those long winter nights had been only dream voices.

Memory was slow to return, and the power of consecutive thought. Ideas flashed across her brain like lightning, and

ideas that were for the greater part false. Her mind was like a diamond-cut crystal reflecting gleams of many-coloured light, or like a kaleidoscope in which thought was for ever running from one form into another. Her brain was never quiet. It thought and thought, and invented and imagined, but rarely remembered, or only remembered the remote past; and even in those memories fact was mixed with fiction. Books that had impressed her long ago were as much a portion of her life as the actual events of the past; and even in her broken memories of books, imagination bewildered and deceived her. There were poems of Byron's, the "Giaour," the "Prisoner of Chillon," which in her girlhood she had been able to repeat from the first line to the last. She could remember a line here and there now, and murmured it to herself sadly, again and again. And out of this grew a fancy that she had known Byron, that she had met him in Italy and in Greece, had stood upon the sea-shore at Lerici when the white-sailed bark that held genius and Shelley vanished from the storm-swept waters. This and a hundred other such fancies filled her brain. She left off thinking of Malcolm Forde, to think of beings she had never known, creatures of her wild imagining.

Left to the companionship of a nurse whose ideas rarely soared above the question of turning a last winter's gown, or putting new ribbon on an old bonnet, invention supplied the place of society. She conversed with phantoms, held mysterious communion with shadows. Were there not people outside her window for whom she had a secret code of signals? Did she not laugh to herself sometimes at the thought of how she cheated her custodians?

Sometimes she was gay with a feverish gaiety, at other times melancholy to despair, weeping a rain of tears without knowing why she wept. Dr. Cameron being informed of these melancholy fits, suggested that she should mix more freely with the other patients; that she should spend an hour or two in the drawing-room with the milder cases, and even attend the weekly soirées, and derive gladness from the Lancers and Caledonians. So one sunny morning, when the aspect of Nature, even in her winter garment, was cheerful, Lady Paulyn's nurse led her down to the drawing-room, and left her there alone on an ottoman near the fireplace, while all the milder cases stared at her with a dreamy indifferent stare, but not without some glimmer of sane superciliousness.

The drawing-room was long and spacious, with a fireplace at each end, oak panelling and family portraits, a room that did really seem a little too good even for the milder cases, who were hardly up to oak panelling or the Sir Joshua Reynolds' school of portraiture. The windows were high and wide, and the sun

shone in upon the scattered figures, not grouped about either of the fireplaces, but scattered about the length and breadth of the room, each as remote as possible from her companions, and all idle. There they sat, solitary among numbers, all staring straight before them after that one brief survey of Elizabeth—some talking to themselves in a dreary monotonous way, others silent.

Elizabeth looked round her wonderingly. What were they? Guests in a country house? What a strange look they had, dressed not unlike other people, with faces like the faces of the rest of womankind so far as actual feature went, yet with so curious a stamp upon every countenance and every figure, and some minute eccentricity in every dress! And then that low sullen muttering—solitary-looking women complaining to themselves in a hopeless subdued manner; then suddenly that low sound of complaint swelled to a little burst of clamour, half-a-dozen shrill voices raised at the same instant, a discordant noise as of cats quarrelling, which was hushed as suddenly at the behest of a clever-looking little woman, dressed in black, who walked quickly up and down the room remonstrating.

There was an open piano near the fireplace. Elizabeth sat down before it presently and began to play—dreamily—as if awakening reason found a vague voice in music. But she had hardly played a dozen bars when a tall gaunt-looking woman, in brown and yellow, came up to her and pulled her away from the piano.

“I’ll have no more of your noise,” she said; “you’re always at it, and I won’t stand it any longer.”

“But I never saw you before to-day,” pleaded Elizabeth, looking at her with innocent wondering eyes—eyes that had grown childlike in that long slumber of the mind. “I can’t have annoyed you before to-day.”

“Stuff and nonsense! You have annoyed me; you’re a detestable nuisance. I won’t have that piano touched. First and foremost, it’s my property——”

“Come, come, Mrs. Sloper,” said the little woman in black, who occupied the onerous post of matron in this part of the establishment. “You musn’t be naughty. You’ve been very naughty all this morning, and I shall really have to complain to Mr. Burley.”

Mr. Burley was the resident medical man, a gentleman who enjoyed the privilege of daily intercourse with the cases, and had to do a good deal of mild flirtation with the first-class lady patients, each of whom fancied she had a peculiar right to the doctor’s attention.

Elizabeth wondered a little to hear a broad-shouldered female, on the wrong side of forty, reproved for naughtiness, in the kind

of tone usually addressed to a child of six. It was strange, but no stranger than the rest of her new life. There were some books on the table by the fireplace, the first books she had seen since her illness. She seized upon them eagerly, and began to turn the leaves, and look at the pictures. They seemed to speak to her, to be full of secret messages from some one she had loved. Who was it she had once loved so dearly? She could not even remember his name.

“O mamma, mamma, mamma!” moaned a lady in an arm-chair on the opposite side of the hearth; a middle-aged lady, stout of build, with pepper-and-salt-coloured hair neatly plaited and tied up with brown ribbons, in the street-door-knocker style, like a school-girl’s. “O, mamma, mamma!” she moaned, lifting her voice with every repetition of her cry; “take me home to my mamma.”

“Miss Chiffinch,” said the matron, “you really must not go on so; you disturb everybody, and it is exceedingly silly to talk like that. Your mamma has been dead for the last twenty years.”

“You fool!” replied Miss Chiffinch, with ineffable scorn, “as if I didn’t know that as well as you.” And then resumed her cuckoo cry, “O, mamma, mamma!”

One young woman, with straight brown hair hanging down her back, walked about the room in a meandering sort of way, trying to fasten herself upon somebody, like the boy who wanted the brute creation to play with him; and, like that idle child, was rejected by all. She came up to Elizabeth presently, as if hoping to obtain sympathy from a new arrival.

“My sisters are so ’appy,” she said; “so ’appy. They’re all at ’ome, and they do enjoy themselves so; they’re as ’appy as the day is long. Don’t you think they’d let me go ’ome? I do want to go ’ome; my sisters are so ’appy.”

“Why don’t you try to employ yourself, Miss Pocock,” demanded the busy little matron, who was always knitting a stocking, and whose needles flew as she walked up and down the room or remonstrated with her charges. “You’d get well as soon again if you’d try to do something; I’ll give you some plain work, if you like; anything would be better than roaming about like that, worrying everybody.”

“O, Mrs. Dawlings, do let me go ’ome,” pleaded Miss Pocock, in her drawling tone; “my sisters are so ’appy. O, dear Mr. Burley,” this with a little gush as she espied the house doctor entering by a door near at hand, “do let me go ’ome. I’ll be so grateful, and I’ll be so good to father, and never be troublesome any more. My sisters are so ’appy!”

“You should have behaved better when you *were* at home,” said Mr. Burley, with friendly candour. “There, go along,” as

Miss Pocock hung upon his arm affectionately, "and try to get well; get some needlework, and sit down and keep yourself quiet." With this scientific advice Mr. Burley walked on and looked at the other patients, with a cool cursory glance at each; as if they had been a flock of sheep, and he, their shepherd, only wanted to assure himself he had the right number.

This was the ladies' drawing-room; the gentlemen had their own apartments in the east wing. The second-class patients, male and female, had their apartments in the west wing; and there were private sitting-rooms in abundance for patients not well enough or quiet enough for general society. The majority of these drawing-room cases were old stagers, people who had been in Dr. Cameron's care for years, and were likely to end their lives, contentedly enough, perhaps, despite that chronic moaning, under his roof. They were well fed, and living thus publicly under the matron's eye were not much subject to the dominion of cruel nurses. They had comfortable rooms, good fires, weekly high-jinks in the winter, little dances on the lawn in the summer, an annual pic-nic, and, in short, such small solace as humanity could devise; and the slow dull lives they led here could hardly have been much slower or duller than the lives which some people, in their right mind, lead by choice in a country town.

Elizabeth looked at her fellow-patients in a dreamy way; turned the leaves of the books—reading a few lines here and there—the words always assuming a kind of hidden meaning for her, as if they had been mystic messages intended for her eye alone; but when the book was closed she had no memory of anything she had read in it. She dined with the milder cases, male and female, in the public dining-room, at the request of Mr. Burley, who wanted to see the effect of society, even such society as that, as an awakening influence.

Here the cases behaved tolerably enough, though exhibiting the selfishness of poor humanity with an amount of candour which does not obtain in the outside world. There was a good deal of grumbling about the viands, chiefly in an under tone, and the patients were perpetually remonstrating with the serving-man who administered to their wants, and who had rather a hard time of it. There were even attempts at conversation: Mr. Burley saying a few words in a brisk business-like way now and then at his end of the table, and the matron politely addressing her neighbours at her end. One elderly gentleman, with a limp white cravat and watery blue eyes, fixed upon Elizabeth, and favoured her with an exposition of his theological views. "You have an intellectual countenance, madam," he said, "and I think you are capable of appreciating my ideas. There is a sad want of intellectuality in people here!

a profound indifference to those larger questions which— No, Dickson, I will *not* have a waxy potato; how many times must I tell you that there is a conspiracy in this house to give me waxy potatoes! Take the plate away, sir! I was about to observe, madam, that you have an intellectual countenance, and are, I doubt not——” Here Dickson’s arrival with his plate again broke the thread of the elderly gentleman’s discourse, and he branched off into a complaint against the administration for its unjust distribution of gravy; and then began again, and kept on beginning again with trifling variation of phrase till the end of dinner.

After dinner Jane Howlet, the nurse, bore Elizabeth away to her own apartment; but here she had now a piano, on which she played for hours together all the old dreamy Mendelssohn and Chopin music which she had played long ago in those dull days at the Vicarage when all her life had been a dream of Malcolm Forde. She played now as she had played then, weaving her thoughts into the music; and slowly, slowly, slowly the curtain was lifted, sense and memory came back, until one day she remembered that she was Lord Paulyn’s wife, and that there was an impassable gulf between her and the man she loved.

So one morning when Dr. Cameron, going his weekly round, with Mr. Burley in attendance on him, asked her the old question about her husband in his gentle fatherly voice, she no longer looked up at him with vague wonder in her eyes, but looked downward with a sad smile, a smile in which there was thought.

“My husband,” she repeated slowly. “No, I do not want to see him. Ours was not a happy marriage. He was always very good to me—let me have my own way in most things—only I couldn’t be happy with him. I used to think that kind of life—a fine lady’s life—must be happiness, but I was punished for my folly. It didn’t make *me* happy.”

This was by far the most reasonable speech she had uttered since she had left Slogh-na-Dyack, but Dr. Cameron looked at his assistant with a pensive smile. “Still very rambling,” he murmured, and then he patted Elizabeth’s head with his gentlemanly hand. “You must try to get well, my dear lady,” he said; “compose yourself, and collect your thoughts, and don’t talk too much. And then I shall soon be able to write to your good kind husband and tell him you are better. Don’t you think he’ll be very pleased to hear that?”

“I don’t know,” answered Elizabeth moodily; “if he cared very much he would hardly have left me here.”

“My dear lady, your coming here was unavoidable. And see what good it has done you!”

"Good!" she cried, with a wild look. "You don't know what I have suffered in the horrible room, locked in, with those brutal women. Good! Why, between them they drove me mad!"

This speech cost Elizabeth a melancholy entry in the physician's note-book: "Very little improvement; ideas wild, delusion about nurses continues."

The weekly festive gatherings, at which she was now permitted to assist, were not enlivening to Lady Pa-lyn's spirits. She sat on a bench against the wall watching the dancers, who really seemed to enjoy themselves in their diverse manners, except Miss Chiffinch, who was not terpsichorean, and who sat in her corner and moaned for her mamma; and Miss Pocock, who, even in the midst of the Caledonians, buttonholed her fellow-dancers in order to inform them that her sisters were "so 'appy."

Mr. Burley himself assisted at these weekly dances, in white-kid gloves, and, as long as things went tolerably well, made believe that the dancers were quite up to the mark, and on a level with dancers in the outside world. Everything was done ceremoniously. The orchestra consisted of a harp, fiddle and clarionet, all played by servants of the establishment. Mr. Burley danced with all the more distinguished ladies; curious-looking matrons in high caps and china-crape shawls, whose gloves were too large for them, but this was a peculiarity of everybody's gloves, being bought for them by the heads of the house with no special reference to size. He asked Elizabeth to dance the First Set with him, but she declined.

"I never dance at servants' balls," she said; "it is all very well to look on for half-an-hour, but I should think they would enjoy themselves more if one kept away altogether."

"But this is not a servants' ball."

"What is it, then?"

Mr. Burley was rather at a loss for a reply.

"A—a friendly little dance," he said, "got up to amuse you all."

"But it doesn't amuse me at all. I don't know any of these people, they have not been introduced to me. I thought it was a servants' party."

"O, Mr. Burley, do please let me go 'ome," exclaimed Miss Pocock, swooping down upon the superintendent. "I do so want to go 'ome. My sisters are so 'appy."

"I tell you what it is, Melinda"—Miss Pocock's name was Melinda, and being youthful she was usually addressed by her Christian name—"if you don't behave yourself properly, you shall be sent to bed. Home indeed; why, you'll have to stop here another twelvemonth if you go on bothering everybody like this."

"O, Mr. Burley! And my sisters are so 'appy. There'll be tarts and negus presently, won't there?"

"Perhaps, if you behave yourself."

"Then I will. But my sisters are so 'appy."

Mr. Burley pushed her away with a friendly push, and she was presently absorbed in the whirlpool of a set of Lancers, and was informing people of her sisters' happiness to the tune of "When the heart of a man is oppressed with care." The house surgeon was more interested in Lady Paulyn than in Miss Melinda Pocock, who was the youngest daughter of an Essex farmer, idle, selfish, greedy, and troublesome, and by no means a profoundly interesting case.

He talked to Elizabeth for a little, talked seriously, and found her answers grow more reasonable as he went on. Did she remember Scotland, and her house there? Yes, she told him, with a shudder. She hated the house, but she loved the country, the hills, and the wide lakes, and the great sea beyond.

"I should like to live out upon those hills alone, all the rest of my life," she said.

"You must get well, and go back there in the summer."

"Not to that house; to a cottage among the hills, a cottage of my own, where I could live by myself. I will never go back to that house and the people in it. But why do you all talk to me about getting well? There is nothing the matter with me, or at least only my tiresome cough, which will be well soon enough."

CHAPTER XVI.

"Peace to his soul, if God's good pleasure be!"

THREE weeks had gone by since Dr. Cameron had written to Lord Paulyn, and Malcolm Forde still waited to hear the result of that application. He went on with his own particular work quietly enough in the mean while, did the heaviest part of the asthmatic curate's duty, read to all the bedridden cottagers within six miles of Hetheridge, went up to London every now and then to see his friends of the Gospel Society, and thus kept himself acquainted with all that was being done for the progress of that great work to which he had given his life, and so lived a not altogether empty or futile existence even during this period of self-abnegation. He had to attend a meeting in town one morning while still waiting for Lord Paulyn's letter, and finding his business finished at one o'clock, went straight to Eaton-

place to call upon Miss Luttrell. He had heard from Dr. Cameron a day or two before, to the effect that there had been no answer from Lord Paulyn, but it was just possible Gertrude herself might have received a letter that very morning. The letter must come sooner or later, he thought, with some explanation of the delay which seemed so heartless.

The Eaton-place man-of-all-work—the man who had given Mr. Forde the ticket for the amateur theatricals at the Rancho—had rather a doubtful air when he asked to see Miss Luttrell. Mrs. Chevenix and Miss Luttrell were at home, he said, but he hardly thought they would see anybody.

“Miss Luttrell will not refuse to see me,” said Mr. Forde, giving the man his card.

“Oh, it’s not that—I know you, sir, only I’m afraid there’s something wrong. But I’ll take your name in.”

He carried the card into the dining-room, and reappeared immediately to usher Mr. Forde in after it.

Mrs. Chevenix and her eldest niece were at luncheon, that is to say, the usual array of edibles—the snug little hot-water dish of cutlets, the imported pie in a crockery crust, the crisp pass-over biscuits, Stilton cheese, dry sherry, silver chocolate pot, and other vanities—had been duly set forth for Mrs. Chevenix’s delectation, but that lady sat gazing absently at these preparations, with consternation written upon her countenance. Gertrude, who also sat idle at the other end of the table, was in the act of shedding tears.

“What is the matter?” Mr. Forde asked, with an alarmed tone. Had there been ill news from Hetheridge in his absence? His heart sank at the thought. But surely that could not be. He had inquired of the woman at the lodge that very morning, and had heard a good account of the patient. He had made this lodge-keeper his friend, bought her fidelity at a handsome price, at the very beginning of things, and so had been able to obtain tidings every day.

The two ladies sighed dolefully, but said nothing. There was an open letter lying beside Gertrude’s plate, a letter edged with black. The letter from Lord Paulyn, he thought. That nobleman must be still in mourning for his mother.

“Have you heard from Rome?” he asked Gertrude; “and does he forbid you seeing your sister? Can he be cruel enough, wicked enough to do that?”

“We have had no letter from Lord Paulyn, and I must beg you not to speak in that impetuous way about my poor nephew-in-law,” said Mrs. Chevenix. “Lord Paulyn is in heaven.”

Malcolm Forde looked at her wonderingly; the phrase seemed almost meaningless at first.

"Yes, it's very dreadful," said Gertrude, "but it's only too true. I'm sure it seems like a dream. He was not a kind brother-in-law to me, and I had very little advantage from such a splendid connection, except, perhaps, being more looked up to and deferred to in Hawleigh society. The same people that asked us to spend the evening before Elizabeth's marriage asked us to dinner afterwards. Beyond that I had nothing to thank Lord Paulyn for. But still it seems so dreadful to be snatched away like that, and only thirty-four; and I fear that after the sadly worldly life he led here he'll find the change to a better world disappointing."

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Forde. "Is Lord Paulyn dead?"

"Yes," sighed Gertrude; "the letter came this morning from his lawyer. He died at Rome last Thursday, after only a week's illness. He had been hunting in the Campagna, his lawyer says, and caught cold, but refused to stay in-doors and nurse himself, as his valet wanted him to do, and the next morning he woke in a high fever; and the landlord of the hotel sent for a doctor, an Italian, who bled him every other day to keep down the fever. But he grew rapidly worse, and died on Thursday morning, just as his servant began to get frightened and was going to call in an English doctor. The lawyer is very angry, and says he must have been murdered by that Italian doctor. It seems very dreadful."

"It will be in the *Morning Post* to-morrow," said Mrs. Chevenix solemnly. "I shouldn't be surprised if they gave him half a column edged with black, like a prime minister. I suppose it would be a mockery to offer you luncheon, Mr. Forde," she went on in a dreary voice; "those cutlets *à la soubise* are sure to be good. You won't? Then we may as well go up to the drawing-room. Give me a glass of sherry, Gertrude. I haven't touched a morsel of anything since breakfast."

So they went upstairs to the drawing-room—that room whose veriest trifles, the fernery, the celadon china, the lobsters and other sea-vermin in modern majolica ware, reminded Malcolm Forde of that bitter day when he had tried to cast Elizabeth Luttrell out of his heart as entirely as he had banished her from his life.

"It seems like a dream," said Gertrude, wiping away a tributary tear, and appeared to think that in this novel remark she had expressed all that could possibly be said about Lord Paulyn's untimely death.

"We shall all have to go into mourning," she went on presently. "So near Ashcombe, of course it would be impossible to avoid it, and I don't suppose he has left us anything for mourning; dying so suddenly, he wouldn't be likely to think of it, and the

summer coming on too, with our dusty roads—positively ruinous for mourning.”

“He is to be brought home to Ashcombe,” said Mrs. Chevenix; “and poor Elizabeth not able to be at the funeral! So sad! And her absence so likely to be noticed in the papers!”

They babbled on about funerals and mourning, and will or no will, while Malcolm Forde sat silent, really like one whose brain is entangled in the mazes of some wild dream. Dead!—the last, remotest possibility he could have dreamed of—dead! And Elizabeth set free, free for him to watch over, for him to cherish, for him to win slowly back to reason and to love!

He thought of her that night at Dunallen, that bitter night, in which temptation assailed him in the strongest form that ever the tempter wore for erring man’s destruction, when she had stretched out her arms to him and pleaded “Keep me with you, Malcolm, keep me with you!” and he had longed with a wild longing to clasp her to his breast, and carry her away to some secure haven of secrecy and loneliness, and defy the world and heaven and hell for her sake. Brief but sharp had been the struggle; few the tears he had shed; but the tears a strong man sheds in such a moment are tears of blood. And behold, now she was free! He might say to her, “Dearest, I will keep you and guard you for ever; and even if the lost light never comes back again—if those sweet eyes must see me for ever dimly through a cloud of troubled thoughts—I may still be your guardian, your companion, your brother, your friend.”

But she would recover—he had Dr. Cameron’s assurance of that. She would recover. God would give her back to life and reason, and to him. How strange and new seemed that wondrous prospect of happiness! like a sudden break in a leaden storm-cloud flooding all the world with sunshine; like an opening in a wood revealing a fair summer landscape new to the gaze of the traveller, fairer than all that he had ever seen upon earth, almost as lovely as his dreams of heaven.

He sat speechless in this wonderful crisis of his life, not daring to thank God for this blessing, since it came to him by so dread a means, by the sudden cutting off of a man who had never injured him, and for whose untimely death he should have felt some natural Christianlike regret.

But he could not bring himself to consider his dead rival, he could only think of his own new future—a future which would give back to him all he had surrendered—a future which would recompense him a thousandfold, even in this lower life, for every sacrifice of inclination, for every renunciation of self-interest, that he had made. It was not his theory that a man’s works should be rewarded in this life; but earthly things are apt to be sweet even to a Christian, and to Malcolm Forde to-day it seemed

that to win back the woman he had loved, to begin again from that unforgotten starting-point when he had held her in his arms under the March moonlight, the star-like eyes looking up at him full of unspeakable love, to recommence existence thus was to be young again, young in a world as new as Eden was to Adam when he woke in the dewy morning and beheld his helpmeet.

And Tongataboo, and the infantine souls who had wanted to worship him as their god, the dusky chiefs who made war upon each other and roasted each other alive upon occasion, only for the want of knowing better, and who were prompt to confess that the God of the Christians, not exacting human sacrifice or self-mutilation, must needs be "a good fellow;" what of these and all those other heathen in the unexplored corners of the earth, to which he was to have carried the cross of Christ? Was he ready to renounce these at a breath, for the sake of his earthly love? No, a thousand times no! Love and duty should go hand-in-hand. His wife should go with him—should help him in his sacred work. He would know how to leave her in some secure shelter when the path he trod was perilous—he would expose her to no danger—but she might be near him always, and sometimes with him, and might help him in his labours, might serve the great cause even by her beauty and brightness—as birds and flowers, lovely, useless, things as we may deem them, swell the universal hymn wherewith God's creatures praise their Creator.

All these thoughts were in his mind, vistas of happiness to come, stretching in dazzling vision far away into the distant future, while he sat silent like a man spellbound, hearing and yet not hearing the voice of Mrs. Chevenix as she held forth at length upon the difference between real property and personal property in relation to a widow's thirds, and the supreme folly, the almost idiocy—sad token of future derangement—which Elizabeth had shown in objecting to a marriage settlement.

"'Heir-presumptive,'" said Mrs. Chevenix, referring to Burke, whose crimson-bound volume lay open close at hand, "'Captain Paulyn, R.N.; born January, 1828; married, October, 1849, Sarah Jane, third daughter of John Henry Towser, Esq., of West Hackney, Middlesex.' Imagine a twopenny-halfpenny naval man inheriting that vast wealth, and perhaps Elizabeth left almost a pauper! If that sweet child had only lived! But there has seemed a fate against that poor girl from the first. What will be her feelings when she recovers her senses, poor child, and is told she is only a dowager! Even the diamonds, I suppose, will have to go to Sarah Jane, third daughter of John Henry Towser" (with ineffable disgust).

"As her nearest relation you will now have the right to see your sister without any one's permission," said Mr. Forde to Gertrude, slowly awakening from that long dream. "She has ceased to belong to any one—but you. Will you come up to Hetheridge to-morrow morning, Gertrude?" He had called her by her Christian name throughout this time of trouble, and to-day it seemed as if she were already his sister. He was eager to think and act for her, to do everything that might hasten the hour of Elizabeth's release.

"I will come if you like, only—there's the mourning; we can't be too quick about that. They may ask us to the funeral."

"*They!* Who? Your brother-in-law had no near relations. There will only be lawyers and the new Viscount interested in this business. Let the dead bury their dead. You have your sister to think of. Could you not send for Blanche? Your sister expressed a desire to see Blanche. I have been thinking that I might find you a furnished house at Hetheridge; there is a pretty little cottage on the outskirts of the village, which I am told is usually let to strangers in summer. If I could get that for you now, you would be close at hand, and could see your sister daily. I have had a good deal of friendly talk with Dr. Cameron, and I am sure that he will do all in his power to hasten her recovery. May I try to secure the cottage for you?"

Gertrude looked at him curiously; she was very pale, and the eyes, which had once been handsome eyes, before time and disappointment had dimmed their lustre, had brightened with an unusual light—not a pleasant light.

"You think of no one but Elizabeth," she said, her voice trembling a little. "It is hardly respectful to the dead."

"I think of the living whom I know more than of the dead whom I only saw for an hour or so once in my life; that is hardly strange. If you are indifferent to your sister's welfare at such a time as this, I will not trouble you about her. I can write to Blanche; she will come, I daresay, if I ask her."

Blanche would come, yes, at the first bidding. Had she not been pestering her elder sister with piteous letters, entreating to be allowed to come to London and see her darling Lizzie, whose madness she would never believe in. It was all a plot of those horrid Paulyns. Gertrude knew very well that Blanche would come.

"You can take the cottage," she said, "if it is not very expensive. Please remember that we are poor. You won't mind my going away, will you, aunt, to be near Elizabeth?"

"My dear Gertrude, how can you ask such a question?" ex-

claimed Mrs. Chevenix expansively. "As if I should for a moment allow any selfish desire of mine to stand between you and poor Elizabeth."

She said this with real feeling; for Gertrude was not a vivacious companion, and her society had for some time been oppressive to Mrs. Chevenix.

It is no small trial for an elderly lady with a highly-cultivated selfishness to have to share her dainty little luncheons and careful little dinners, her decanter of Manzanilla, and her cup of choicest Mocha, with a person who is neither profitable nor entertaining.

"Mr. Foljambe the lawyer, a person in Gray's-inn, promises to call to-morrow," said Mrs. Chevenix presently. "I suppose we shall hear all the sad particulars from him, and about the will, if there is a will."

In the question of the will Mr. Forde felt small interest. Was he not rich enough for both, rich enough to go back to those sunny isles in the Southern Sea with his sweet young wife to bear him company; rich enough to build her a pleasant home in that land where before very long, if he so chose, he might write himself down Bishop? All his desires were bounded by the hope of her speedy recovery and release. He could go to Dr. Cameron now with a bolder front; could tell the kindly physician that brief and common story which the doctor had perhaps guessed at ere now; could venture to say to him, "I have watched over and cared for her not only because I was her father's friend, and remember her in her bright youth, but because I have loved her as well as ever a woman was loved upon this earth."

CHAPTER XVII.

"The widest land
 Doom takes to part us, leaves thy heart in mine
 With pulses that beat double. What I do
 And what I dream include thee, as the wine
 Must taste of its own grapes. And when I sue
 God for myself, He hears that name of thine,
 And sees within my eyes the tears of two."

THE cottage was hired; a rustic little box of a place containing four rooms and a kitchen, with a lean-to roof; a habitation just redeemed from absolute commonness by a prettily-arranged garden, a green porch, and one bow window; but Gertrude, who

came to Hetheridge with her worldly goods in a cab, declared the place charming, worthy of Mr. Forde's excellent taste. This was before noon of the day after Malcolm heard of Lord Paulyn's death. He had lost no time, but had taken the cottage, engaged the woman who kept it to act as servant, seen Dr. Cameron, who had that morning received a letter from Mr. Foljambe the lawyer, and was inexpressibly shocked at the event which it announced, and had wrung from him a somewhat reluctant consent to the sisters seeing each other on the following day.

"There is a marked improvement; yes, I may venture to say a decided improvement; but Lady Paulyn is hardly as well as I could wish. The mind still wanders; nor is the physical health all I could desire. But that doubtless will be benefited by milder weather."

"And freedom," said Malcolm Forde eagerly. "Elizabeth's soul is too wild a bird not to languish in a cage. Give her back to the scenes of her youth and the free air of heaven, and I will be responsible for the completion of her cure. You will not tell her of her husband's death yet a while, I suppose?"

"I think not. The shock might be too great in her present weak condition."

Three o'clock in the afternoon was the hour Dr. Cameron appointed for the interview, and at half-past two Mr. Forde called at the cottage. He had promised to take Gertrude to the park gate, and to meet her in the Hetheridge-road on her return, so that he might have early tidings of the interview.

It was a balmy afternoon in early spring, the leafless elms faintly stirred by one of those mild west winds which March sometimes steals from his younger brother April, an afternoon of sunshine and promise, which cheats the too hopeful soul with the fond delusion that summer was not very far off, that equinoctial gales are done with, and the hawthorn blossom ready to burst through the russet brown of the hedgerows. Hetheridge is a spot beautiful even in winter, essentially beautiful in spring, when the undulating pastures that slope away from the crest of the hill down to the very edge of the distant city are clothed in their freshest verdure, and dotted with wild purple crocuses, which flourish in profusion on some of the Hetheridge pastures. Hetheridge has as yet escaped the builder; half-a-dozen country houses, for the most part of the William-and-Mary period, are scattered along the rural-looking road, a few more clustered near the green. Shops there are none; only a village inn, with sweet-smelling white-curtained bedchambers and humble sanded parlours, and a row of cottages, an avenue of ancient elms, and the village church to close the vista. At the church gates the road makes a sudden wind, and descends the hill gently, still

keeping high above the distant city and the broad valley between, to the gates of Hetheridge Park.

"This bright afternoon seems a good omen," said Malcolm Forde, as he and Gertrude came near this gate.

"O, dear Mr. Forde, surely *you* are not superstitious!" exclaimed Gertrude with a shocked air.

"Superstitious, no; but one is cheered by the sunshine. I am glad the sun will shine on your first meeting with your sister. Think of her, Gertrude, a prisoner on this lovely day!"

"But she is not a prisoner in the slightest degree. Don't you remember Dr. Cameron told us she was to have carriage airings?"

"Yes, to be driven out with other patients, I suppose, for a stiff little drive. I don't think Elizabeth would mistake that for liberty. This is the gate. I will leave you to find your own way to the house. I have no permission to cross the boundary. You will find me here when you come back."

He waited a long hour, his imagination following Gertrude into that old red-brick mansion, his fancy seeing the face he loved almost as vividly as he had seen it with his bodily eyes that night at Dunallen. What would be the report? Would she strike Gertrude strangely, as a changed creature, not the sister she had known a year or two ago, but a being divided from her by a great gulf, distant, unapproachable, strange as the shadowy semblance of the very dead? It was an hour of unspeakable anxiety. All his future life seemed now to hang upon what Gertrude should tell him when she came out of that gate. At first he had walked backwards and forwards, for a distance of about a quarter of a mile, by the park fence. Later he could not do this, so eagerly did he expect Gertrude's return, but stood on the opposite side of the road, with his back against a stile, watching the gate.

She came out at last, walking slowly, with her veil down. His watch told him that she had been just a few minutes more than an hour; his heart would have made him believe that he had waited half a day. She did not see him, and was walking towards the village, when he crossed the road and placed himself by her side.

"Well," he cried eagerly, "tell me everything, for God's sake! Did she know you? Was she pleased to see you? Did she talk reasonably, like her old self?"

Gertrude did not answer immediately. He repeated his question. "For God's sake tell me!"

"Yes," she said, not looking up, "she knew me, and seemed rather pleased, and talked of our old life at Hawleigh, and poor papa, and was very reasonable. I don't think there is much the matter with her mind."

“Thank God, thank God! I knew He would be good to us. I knew He would listen to our prayers! And she is better, nearly well! God bless that good Dr. Cameron! I was inclined to hate him at first, and to think that he meant to lock her up and hide her from us all the days of her life. But he only did what was right, and he has cured her. Gertrude, why do you keep your veil down like that, and your head bent so that I can't see your face? There is nothing to be unhappy about now that she is so much better. If she knew you and talked to you reasonably of the past, she must be very much better. You should be as glad as I am, as grateful for God's mercy to us.”

He took hold of her arm, trying to look into her face, but she turned away from him and burst into a passion of weeping.

“She is dying!” she said at last; “I saw death in her face. She is dying; and I have helped to kill her!”

“Dying! Elizabeth dying!” He uttered the words mechanically, like a man half stunned by a terrible blow.

“She is dying!” Gertrude repeated with passionate persistence. “Dr. Cameron may talk of her being only a little weak, and getting well again when the mild weather comes, but she will never live to see the summer. Those hollow cheeks, those bright, bright eyes, they pierced me to the heart. That was how mamma looked, just like that, a few months before she died. Just like Elizabeth, to-day. That little worrying cough, those hot dry hands—all, all the dreadful signs I know so well. O, Mr. Forde, for God's sake don't look at me like that, with that dreadful look in your face! You make me hate myself worse than ever, and I have hated myself bitterly enough ever since——”

“Ever since what?” he asked, with a sudden searching look in his eyes, his face white as the face of death. Had he not just received his death-blow, or the more cruel death-blow of all his sweet new-born hopes, his new life? “Ever since what?” he repeated sternly.

She covered and shrank before him, looking at the ground, and trembling like some hunted animal. “Since I tried to part you and Elizabeth,” she said. “I suppose it was very wicked, though I wrote only the truth. But everything has gone wrong with us since then. It seemed as if I had let loose a legion of troubles.”

“You tried to part us—you wrote only the truth! What! Then the anonymous letter that sowed the seeds of my besotted jealousy was your writing?”

“It was the truth, word for word as I heard it from Frederick Melvin.”

“And you wrote an anonymous letter—the meanest, vilest

form which malice ever chooses for its cowardly assault—to part your sister and her lover! May I ask, Miss Luttrell, what I had done to deserve this from you?”

“That I will never tell you,” she said, looking up at him for the first time doggedly.

“I will not trouble you for your reasons. You did what you could to poison my life, and perhaps your sister’s. And now you tell me she is dying. But she shall not die,” he cried passionately, “if prayer and love can save her. I will wrestle for my darling, as Jacob wrestled with the angel. I will supplicate day and night; I will give her the best service of my heart and brain. If science and care and limitless love can save her, she shall be saved. But I think you had better go back to Devonshire, Miss Luttrell, and let me have your sister Blanche for my ally. It was not your letter that parted us, however. I was not quite weak enough to be frightened by any anonymous slander. It was my own hot-headed folly, or your sister’s fatal pride, that severed us. Only I should hardly like to say anything about her after what you have told me. There would be something too much of Judas in the business.”

“O, Mr. Forde, how hard you are towards me! And I acted for the best,” said Gertrude, whimpering. “I thought that I was only doing my duty towards you. I felt so sure that you and Elizabeth were unsuited to each other, that she could never make you happy——”

“Pray who taught you to take the measure of my capacity for happiness?” cried Mr. Forde with sudden passion. “Your sister was the only woman who ever made me happy——” he checked himself, remembering that this was treason against that gentler soul he had loved and lost—“the only woman who ever made me forget everything in this world except herself. The only woman who could have kept me a bond slave at her feet, who could have put a distaff in my hand, and made me false to every purpose of my life. But that is all past now, and if God gives her back to me I will serve Him as truly as I love her.”

“Say that you forgive me, dear Mr. Forde,” pleaded Gertrude in a feeble piteous voice. “You can’t despise me more than I despise myself, and yet I acted with the belief that I was only doing my duty. It seemed right for you to know. I used to think it over in church even, and it seemed only right you should know. Do say that you forgive me!”

“Say that I forgive you!” cried Mr. Forde bitterly. “What is the good of my forgiveness? Can it undo the great wrong you did if that letter parted us, if it turned the scale by so much as a feather’s weight? I forgive you freely enough. I despise you too much to be angry.”

“O, that is very cruel!”

“Do you expect to gather grapes from the thorns you planted? Be content if the thorn has not stung you to death.”

“But you’ll let me stay, won’t you, Mr. Forde, and see my poor sister as often as Dr. Cameron will allow me? Remember, I was not obliged to confess this to you. I might have kept my secret for ever. You would never have suspected me.”

“Hardly. I knew it was a woman’s work, but I could not think it was a sister’s.”

“I told you of my own free will, blackened myself in your eyes, and if you are so hard upon me, where can I expect compassion? Let me stay, and do what I can to be a comfort to Elizabeth.”

“How can I be sure that you are sincere—that you really wish her well? You may be planning another anonymous letter. You may consider it your duty to come between us again.”

“What, with my sister on the brink of the grave?” cried Gertrude, bursting into tears—tears which seemed the outpouring of a genuine grief.

“So be it then. You shall stay, and I will try to forget you ever did that mean and wicked act.”

“You forgive me?”

“As I hope God has already forgiven you.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

“Now three years since
This had not seemed so good an end for me;
But in some wise all things wear round betimes
And wind up well.”

ELIZABETH has been nearly five months a widow. It is the end of July. She is at Penarthur, a little Cornish town by the sea, at the extreme western point of the land, a sheltered nook where the climate is almost as mild as the south of France; where myrtles climb over all the cottages, and roses blossom among the very chimney-pots; where the sea has the hues of a fine opal or a peacock’s breast, for ever changing from blue to green. Penarthur is a combination of market-town and a fashionable watering-place; the town, with its narrow High-street, and bank, and post-office, and market, and busy-looking commercial inn, lying a little inland, the fashionable district

consisting of a row of white-walled houses and one huge many-balconied hotel, six stories high, facing the Atlantic Ocean.

Among the white houses, there is one a little better than the rest standing alone in a small garden, a garden full of roses and carnations, mignonette and sweet-peas, and here they have brought Elizabeth. They are all with her—Gertrude, Diana, and Blanche; Anne, the old Vicarage nurse, who has left her comfortable retirement at Hawleigh to wait upon her darling; and Malcolm Forde, who lodges in a cottage near at hand, but who spends all his days with Elizabeth. With Elizabeth, for whom alone he seems to live in those bitter-sweet hours of close companionship; with Elizabeth, who is never to be his wife. God has restored her reason; but across the path that might have been so fair and free for these two to tread together there has crept the darkness of a shadow which forebodes the end of earthly hope.

He has her all to himself in these soft summer days, in this quiet haven by the sea, no touch of pride, no thought of conflicting duty to divide them; but he knows full surely that he will have her only for a little while; that the sweet eyes which look at him with love unspeakable are slowly, slowly fading; that the oval cheek, whose wasting line the drooping hair disguises, is growing more hollow day by day; that nothing love or science can do—and he has well-nigh exhausted the resources of both in her service—can delay their parting. Not upon this earth is he to reap the harvest of his labours; not in earthly happiness is he to find the fruition of his faith. The darkest hour of his life lies before him, and he knows it; sees the bolt ready to descend, and has to smile and be cheerful, and beguile his dear one with an aspect of unchanging serenity, lest by any betrayal of his grief he should shorten the brief span in which they may yet be together.

Physicians, the greatest in the land, have done their utmost. She had lived too fast. That short reign of splendour in Park-lane, perpetual excitement, unceasing fatigue, unflagging high spirits or the appearance of high spirits, the wild grief that had followed her baby's death, the vain regrets that had racked her soul even in the midst of her brilliant career, the excitement and fever of an existence which was meant to be all pleasure—these were among the causes of her decline. There had been a complete exhaustion of vitality, though the amount of vitality had been exceptional; the ruin of a superb constitution, worn out untimely by sheer ill-usage.

“Men drink themselves to death very often,” said one of the doctors to Malcolm Forde; “and women just as often wear themselves to death. This lovely young woman has worn out a constitution which ought to have lasted till she was eighty. Very

said, a complete decline of vital force. The cough we might get over, patch up the lungs, or make the heart do their work; but the whole organisation is worn out."

Mr. Forde had questioned them as to the possible advantages of change of climate. He was ready to carry her to the other end of the world, if Hope beckoned him.

"If she should live till October, you might take her to Madeira," said his counsellor, "though this climate is almost as good. The voyage might be beneficial, or might not. With so delicate an organisation to deal with, one can hardly tell."

That disease, which is of all maladies the most delusive, allowed Elizabeth many hours of ease and even hopefulness. She did not see the fatal shadow that walked by her side. Never had the world seemed so fair to her or life so sweet. The only creature she had ever deeply loved was restored to her; a happy future waited for her. Her intervals of bodily suffering she regarded as an ordeal through which she must pass patiently, always cheered by that bright vision of the days to come, when she was to be Malcolm's helpmeet and fellow worker. The pain and weariness were hard to bear sometimes, but she bore them heroically, as only a tiresome detail in the great business of getting well; and after a night of fever and sleeplessness, would greet Malcolm's morning visit with a smile full of hope and love.

She was very fond of talking to him of their future, the strange world she was to see, the curious child-like people whose little children she was to teach; funny coloured children, with eyes blacker than the sloes in the Devonshire lanes, and flashing white teeth; children who would touch her white raiment with inquisitive little paws, and think her a goddess, and wonder why she did not spread her wings and soar away to the blue sky. Her brain was singularly active; the apathy which had been a distinguishing mark of her mental disorder a few months ago, which had even continued for some time after she had left Hetheridge Hall, had now given place to all the old vivacity. She was full of schemes and fancies about that bright future; planned every room in the one-story house, bungalow-shaped, which Malcolm was to build for her; was never tired of hearing him describe those sunny islands in the Southern Sea.

They had been talking of these things one sultry afternoon, in a favourite spot of Elizabeth's, a little enrve of the shore where there was a smooth stretch of sand, sheltered by a screen of rocks. She could not walk so far, but was brought here in a bath-chair, and sometimes, when weakest, reclined here on a

couch made of carriage-rugs and air pillows. This afternoon they were alone. The three sisters had gone off on a pilgrimage to Mordred Castle, and had left them to the delight of each other's company.

"How nice it is to be with you like this!" Elizabeth said softly, putting a wasted little hand into Malcolm's broad palm, a hand which seemed smaller to him every time he clasped it. "I wish there was more castles for the others to see, only that sounds ungrateful when they are so good to me. Do you know, Malcolm, I lie awake at night often—the cough keeps me awake a good deal, but it would be all the same if I had no cough—I lie and wonder at our happiness, wonder to think that God has given me all I ever desired; even now, after I played fast and loose with my treasure, and seemed to lose it utterly. I hope I am not glad of poor Reginald's death; he was always very good to me, you know, in his way; and I was not at all good to him in my way; but I can't help being happy even now, before the blackness has worn off my first mourning. It seems dreadful for a woman in widow's weeds to be so happy and planning a new life; but it is only going backwards. O, Malcolm, why were you so hard upon me that day? Think how many years of happiness we have lost!"

He was sitting on the ground by the side of her heaped-up pillows, but with his back almost turned upon her bed, his eyes looking seaward, haggard and tearless.

"You might as well answer me, Malcolm. But I suppose you do think me very wicked; only remember it was you who first spoke of our new life together."

"My darling, can I do anything but love you to distraction?" he said in utter helplessness. The hour would come, alas too soon, in which he must tell her the bitter truth; that on earth there was no such future for those two as the future she dreamed of; that her pilgrimage must end untimely, leaving him to tread his darkened path alone, verily a stranger and a pilgrim, with no abiding city, with nothing but the promise of a home on the farther shore of Death's chill river.

Would he meet her in that distant land? Yes, with all his heart and mind he believed in such a meeting. That he should see her as he saw her to-day, yet more lovely; that he would enter upon a new life, reunited with all he had loved on earth, united by a more spiritual communion, held together in a heavenly bondage, as fellow-subjects and servants of his Master. But even with this assurance it was hard to part; man's earth-born nature clung to the hope of earthly bliss—to keep her with him here, now for a few years. The chalice of eternal bliss was hardly sweet enough to set against the bitterness of this present loss.

He must tell her, and very soon. They had often talked together of serious things during these summer days by the sea—talked long and earnestly; and Elizabeth's mind, which had once been so careless of great subjects, had assumed a gentle gravity; a spirituality that filled her lover with thankfulness and joy. But pure as he knew her soul to be, almost childlike in her unquestioning faith, full of penitence for the manifold errors of her short life, he dared not leave her in ignorance of the swift-coming change; dared not let her slip out of life unawares like an infant that dies in its mother's arms.

Should he tell her now; here in this sweet sunny loneliness, by this untroubled sea, calm as that sea of glass before the great white throne? The hot passionate tears welled up to his eyes at the very thought. How should he shape the words that should break her happy dream?

"Malcolm, what makes you so quiet this afternoon?" she asked, lifting herself a little on her pillows, in the endeavour to see his face, which he still kept steadily towards the sea. "Are you beginning to change your mind about me? Are you sorry you promised to take me abroad with you, to make me a kind of junior partner in your work? You used to talk of our future with such enthusiasm, and now it is only I who go babbling on; and you sit silent staring at the sea-gulls, till I am startled all at once by the sound of my own voice in the utter stillness. *Have* you changed your mind, Malcolm? Don't be afraid to tell me the truth; because I love you far too well to be a hindrance to you. Perhaps you have reflected, and have begun to think it would be troublesome to have a wife with you in your new mission."

"My dearest," he said, turning to her at last and holding her in his arms, her tired head lying upon his shoulder, "my dearest, I never cherished so sweet a hope as the hope of spending all my future life with you; but God seldom gives a man that very blessing he longs for above all other things. It may be that it is not well for a man to say, 'Upon that one object I set all my earthly hope.' Our life here is only a journey; we have no right to desire it should be a paradise; it is not an inn, but a hospital. Darling, God has been very good to us in uniting us like this, even for a little while."

"For a little while!" she cried, with a frightened look "Then you *do* mean to leave me!"

"Never, dear love. I will never leave you."

"Why do you frighten me, then, by talking like that? Why do you let me build upon our future, till I can almost see the tropical trees and flowers, and the very house we are to live in, and then say that we are only to be together for a little while?"

"If you were to be called away, Elizabeth, to a brighter world than that you dream of, leaving me to finish my pilgrimage alone? It has been too sweet a dream, dearest. I gave my life to labour, and not to such supreme happiness; and now, they tell me, I am not to take you with me yonder. I am to have no such sweet companionship; only the memory of your love, and bitter lifelong regret."

At this he broke down utterly, and could speak no further word; but still strove desperately to stifle his sobs, to hide his agony from those fond questioning eyes.

"You mean that I am going to die," she said very slowly, a curious wondering tone; "the doctors have told you that. O Malcolm, I am so sorry for you; and for myself, too. We should have been so happy; for I think I am cured of all my old faults, and should have gone on growing better for your sake. And I meant to be very good, Malcolm—never to be tired of trying to do good—so that some day you might have been almost proud of me; might have looked back upon this time and said, 'After all, I did not do an utterly foolish thing in letting her love me.'"

"Might have been; " "should have been." The words smote him to the heart.

"O my love," he cried, "live, live for my sake! Defy your doctors, and get well for my sake! We will not accept their doom. They have been false prophets before now; prove them false again. Come back to life and health, for my sake!"

She gave a little feeble sigh, looking at him pityingly with the too brilliant eyes.

"No," she said, "I am afraid they are right this time; I have wondered a good deal to find that getting well was such a painful business. I am afraid they are right, Malcolm; and you will begin your new mission alone. It is better, perhaps, for all intents and purposes, except just a little frivolous happiness, which you can do without. You will have your great work still; God's blessing, and the praise of good men. What have I been in your life?"

"All the world to me, darling; all my world of earthly hope. Elizabeth," in a voice that trembled ever so little, "I have told you this because I thought it my duty. It was not right that you alone should be ignorant of our fears; that if—if that last great change were at hand, you should be in the smallest measure unprepared to meet it. But I do not despair; no, darling, our God may have pity upon us even yet, may grant our human wishes, and give us a few short years to spend together."

"Strangers and pilgrims," she said in a thoughtful voice "Pilgrims who have no abiding city. I was very foolish to

think so much of our new life in a new world. The world where we shall meet is older than the stars."

CHAPTER XIX.

"But dead! All's done with: wait who may,
 Watch and wear and wonder who will.
 O, my whole life that ends to-day!
 O, my soul's sentence, sounding still;
 'The woman is dead, that was none of his;
 And the man, that was none of hers, may go!'"

No gloomy forebodings, no selfish repinings ever fell from the lips of Elizabeth after that sad day by the sea. A gentle thoughtfulness, a sweet serenity, lent a mournful charm to her manner, and spiritualised her beauty. She was only sorry for *him*, for that faithful lover from whose side relentless Death too soon must call her away. Her own regrets had been of the briefest. These few summer months spent wholly with Malcolm Forde, in so perfect and complete a union, held enough happiness for a common lifetime.

"It cannot matter very much if one spreads one's life over years, or squanders it in a summer," she said with her old smile, "so long as one lives. I don't suppose all the rest of Cleopatra's jewels ever gave her half so much pleasure as that one pearl she melted in vinegar. And if I had been with you for twenty summers, Malcolm, could we ever have had a happier one than this?"

"We have been very happy, darling. And if God spares you we may have many another summer as sweet as this."

"If! But you know that will not be. O Malcolm, don't try to deceive me with false hopes, for fear you should end by deceiving yourself. Let us make the best of our brief span, without a thought beyond the present, except such thoughts as you will teach me—my education for heaven."

The time came—alas, how swiftly!—when it would have been too bitter a mockery to speak of earthly hope, when these two—living to themselves alone, as if unconscious of an external world—and those about them, knew that the end was very near. The shadow hovered ever at her side. At any moment, like a sudden cloud that drifts across the sunlight, Death's mystic veil might fall upon the face Malcolm Forde loved, and leave them side by side, yet worlds asunder.

She was very patient, enduring pain and weakness with a gentle heroism that touched all around her.

"It is not much to suffer pain," she said one day, when Malcolm had praised her patience, "lying here, in the air and sunshine, with my hand in yours, after—after what I suffered last winter, in silence and solitude, with cruel jailers who dragged me about with their rough hands, and with my mind full of confused thoughts of you, thinking you were near me, that in the next moment you would appear and rescue me, and yet with a half consciousness of *that* being only a dream, and you far away. It seems very little to bear, this labouring breath and this hacking cough, after that."

All his life was given up to her service, reading to her, talking to her, watching her fitful slumbers; for as she grew weaker her nights became still more wakeful, and she dozed at intervals through the day. All his reading was from one inspired volume; he had offered to read other things, lest she should weary of those divine pages, but she refused.

"I was not always religiously disposed," she said; "but in my most degenerate days I always felt the sublimity of the Bible."

At her special request he read her all the epistles of St. Paul, lingering upon particular chapters; she, in her stronger moments, questioning him earnestly about the great apostle.

"Do you know why my mind dwells so much upon St. Paul?" she asked him one day.

"There are a hundred reasons for your admiration of one who was only second to his Divine Master."

"Yes, I have always appreciated his greatness in thought and deed; only there was another reason for my admiration—his likeness to you."

"Elizabeth!" with a warning look, an old look which she remembered in the Hawleigh days, when his worshippers had all confessed to being more or less afraid of him.

"Is it wrong to make such a comparison? After all, you know, St. Paul was a human being before he was a saint. His fearlessness, his untiring energy, his exultant spirit, so strong in direst extremity, so great in the hour of peril, all remind me of you—or of what you seemed to me at Hawleigh. And you will go on in the same road, Malcolm, when I am no longer a stumbling-block and a hindrance in your way. You will go on, rejoicing through good and evil, with the great end always before you, like that first apostle of the Gentiles, whose strong right arm broke down the walls of heathendom. And I—if there were any thought or feeling in the grave—should be so proud of having once been loved by you!"

"Malcolm, I have a good deal of money, have I not?" she

asked him one day. "Aunt Chevenix told me I was left very well off, although Lord Paulyn died without a will. I was to have a third of his personal property, or something like that."

"Yes, dearest."

"And does that come to very much?"

"About seventy thousand pounds."

"Seventy thousand!" she repeated, opening her eyes very wide; "and to think how poor papa used to grumble about writing a cheque for four or five pounds. I wish I could have had a little of my seventy thousand advanced to me then. Ought I not to make a will, Malcolm?"

"It seems to me hardly necessary. Your sisters are your natural heirs, and they are the only people who would inherit."

"They would have all my money, then?"

"Among them—yes."

She made no farther inquiries, and he was glad to change the drift of their talk; but when he came at his usual hour next morning, he met a little man in black, attended by an overgrown youth with a blue bag, on the doorstep, and on the point of departing.

"Congratulate me on my business-like habits, Malcolm," Elizabeth said, smiling at him from her sofa by the window; "I have just made my will."

"My dearest, why trouble yourself to do that when we had already settled that no will was necessary?" he said, seating himself in the chair beside her pillows, a chair which was kept sacred to his use, the sisters yielding him the right to be nearest to her always at this time.

"I had not settled anything of the kind. Seventy thousand would have been a great deal too much for my sisters; it would have turned their heads. I have left them thirty thousand in—what do you call those things?—Consols; a sure three hundred a year for each of them, the lawyer says; and I have left five thousand to Hilda Disney, whom I always detested, but who has next to nothing of her own, poor creature. And the rest I have left to you—for your mission, Malcolm."

He bent down to kiss the pale forehead, but words were slow to come. "Let this be as you wish, dearest," he said at last; "I need no such remembrance of you, but it will be my proudest labour to raise a fitting memorial of your love. In every one of those islands I have told you about—God granting me life to complete the task—there shall be an English church dedicated to St. Elizabeth. Your name shall sound sweet in the ears of my proselytes at the farther end of the world."

The end came soon after this. A sultry twilight, faint stars

far apart in a cloudless opal sky—the last splendour of the sunset fading slowly along the edge of the western sea-line.

She was lying in her favourite spot by the open window, her sisters grouped at one end of the sofa, Malcolm in his place at the other, his strong arm supporting her, his shoulder the pillow for her tired head.

“Malcolm, do you remember the day of our picnic at Lawborough Beeches? Centuries ago, it seems to me.”

“Have I ever forgotten any day or hour we spent together? Yes, dear, I remember perfectly.”

“And how we went down the Tabor in that big clumsy old boat, and you told me the story of your first love?”

“Yes, dear, I remember.”

“You could never have guessed what a wicked creature I was that day. But you did think me ill-tempered, didn’t you?”

“I feared I had grieved or offended you.”

“It was not temper, or grief, or anything of the kind; it was sheer wickedness—wicked jealousy of that good girl who died. I envied her, Malcolm—envied her the joy of dying in your arms.”

No answer, save a passionate kiss on the cold forehead.

“I did not think it would be my turn one day,” she went on slowly, looking up at him with those lovely eyes clouded by death’s awful shadow,—“I did not think that these dear arms would hold me too in life’s last hour; that the last earthly sight my fading eyes should see would be the eyes I love. No, Malcolm, no; not with that look of pain! I am quite happy.”

THE END.

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